



The
**Judas
Tree**

Patricia le Roy

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Prologue

Anne

Uzès, August 1990

Composing the letter takes me most of the night. I finished writing the rest two days ago. It's nearly dawn when I finally fall asleep. When I awake, I feel more refreshed than I have for months.

I spring out of bed and open the shutters. My window looks out on the hill behind the house. The first thing I see is the old forked acacia tree with ivy round its trunk. Behind it is the bright yellow tent that Sophie's children put up a few days ago. They are playing in it now: I can hear their voices. The sun is already high, and the sky is a vivid deep blue. The different greens of Provence pour down the hill. The air is soft with the scents of the garrigue. It's going to be a perfect summer's day.

Standing there at the window, with the sights and smells of my childhood filling my senses, I am suddenly overcome with a wave of pure happiness. I feel as though I am standing on the threshold of something wonderful. It's one of those days when everything seems possible. Everything stretches before you. The best is yet to come.

And I know exactly how I am going to spend this perfect day. I am going on an excursion to the Cévennes. An Ausflug, as my mother used to call it when I was small. But today it will be an excursion on my own. I know exactly where I want to go, and I don't want anyone with me. I want to go and look at the place, and see if it's still the same.

Leaving the window open, I shower and dress and go downstairs. It's nearly ten o'clock. No one is around. I eat my breakfast on the terrace alone. Olivier has left for the hospital, Sophie is in her studio, the children are in their tent. I eat three tartines grillées and drink two cups of coffee. The sun is warm on my face. I savour each mouthful. When I have finished eating, I go back upstairs and put the letter and everything else inside the violin case where Matthias will find them. Then I ask Sophie if I can borrow her car.

The mountains are fifty miles away. As I drive, I think of nothing but the things I see. A field of sunflowers coming into sight round a bend in the road. The warm old stones of a farmhouse set among the fields. The sun pours down. My mind is clear. I don't think of Matthias once. The only person with me in the car is my grandfather, Ernst, the mythical monster who died before I was born. It's a pity I never met Ernst. We have things in common.

It takes me over an hour to reach Anduze. Through the town, across the river. And then the mountains rise before me, and the road begins to climb.

1. THE SHIP ON THE DEEP BLACK SEA

MATTHIAS

I met my wife at a rehearsal of the Collegium in October 1985. That evening we were working on the Fourth Brandenburg Concerto. As we finished the second run-through of the first movement, I looked up and saw a girl with short blonde hair sitting on the other side of the room, next to Tante Lili. She had perfect, delicate features, and an air of being out of place. She did not belong in that sombre music room. There was something so light and luminous about her that I could not take my eyes off her.

Leipzig's first Collegium Musicum had been founded by Telemann in the early eighteenth century, and conducted by Bach when he was Kantor of the Thomaskirche. The second had been founded by Magdalena and myself two hundred and fifty years later. It was composed, most of the time, of four violins, one viola, a cello and a double bass. Occasionally, we were joined by an oboe player, sometimes by a flautist. We never made any attempt to expand our numbers further. A bigger group might not have been allowed. We rehearsed every Tuesday evening in the music room of my Aunt Lili's apartment in August-Bebel-Strasse, and occasionally performed to a hand-picked audience in the same place. Our repertory was exclusively baroque, and included a lot of the Kantor's own music.

I went on staring at the blonde girl. She was wearing a high-necked pullover in a shade of yellow I had never seen before. She looked like a visitor from another planet.

"Who's that?" I asked Silke, the viola player.

"Das ist die Anne. The French girl I told you about. The violinist."

"The one who might replace Magdalena?"

"Richtig," said Silke.

It fell into place so neatly that it might have been foreordained. Magdalena was pregnant, suffering from high blood pressure, and under instructions to rest as much as possible. We could have managed for a few months with three violins instead of four, but then Silke happened to mention the new French Assistentin at the Institute who

played the violin, and was looking for someone to play with. Everyone jumped at the idea, apart from Sonja, who hated change of any kind, and Peter, who was always in the clouds. Topmost in all our minds was the fact that she was a foreigner, with all the advantages that implied, although no one mentioned them out loud. It was agreed that Silke should bring her to a rehearsal so we could look her over. If that went well, she would be invited to try out.

That evening, I was the first to introduce myself, and she smiled at me as soon as she heard my name.

“Your family must have come here from France,” she said.

“Yes, they came to Leipzig from a small town called Uzès at the end of the seventeenth century.”

“Uzès?” she said, staring at me. “Are you sure?”

“Yes, I’m quite sure. The town of Uzès had been Protestant since the 1540’s, you see, and in fact the whole of the nearby Cévennes region- “

“But I’m from Uzès,” she said, laughing delightedly, and that was when Tante Lili, who was standing nearby and had overheard everything, moved into the conversation and took it over. For the next fifteen minutes, she gave Anne a full run-down of our family history, beginning with Jacques Girardet, wool-carder by trade, who had left Uzès in 1687, accompanied by his wife Marguerite and their six children, with their possessions in an ox-drawn cart, and the children walking alongside. It had taken them two months to get as far as Geneva; after that, they had taken a boat up the Rhine, and then they had walked across Germany. They had arrived in Magdeburg in the spring of 1688, according to the family Bible they had brought with them. Jacques had died there six years later, at which point Marguerite and their surviving children, two boys and a girl, had moved to Leipzig for reasons unknown. Lili was beginning to speculate on what those reasons might have been when Magdalena called us to order, and I had to go back to the rehearsal. Undeterred, Lili took Anne out into the corridor to go on with the story. The room seemed a little darker after they left. Halfway through the third run-through, Magdalena stopped us to complain about the tempo, and I saw that Lili had come back into the room alone.

"She had to leave," she informed me during the next break, "but I invited her to tea on Sunday. I think she's homesick, poor girl."

She was very homesick: that much was clear when we saw her again. She was finding life in the DDR very strange. It was not what she had expected. Neither Lili

nor I understood why she had come here. It wasn't easy for Western students to get a post in the DDR, she said so herself, but she offered no explanation as to why she had made the effort to do so. Towards the end of the visit, however, we discovered that her mother was West German. Her father was an antique dealer, and her sister was a picture restorer. Her parents were divorced, and her mother taught German in a lycée in Avignon. We were fascinated by this image of a Western bourgeois family. After Anne left, we spent most of the evening speculating about her, and finally decided that youthful communist sympathies might have led her to rebel against her family. It wouldn't be the first time that foreign communists had suffered disenchantment on coming into contact with our system.

She came back the following week armed with a stack of picture postcards and a map of Uzès. We pored over them, fascinated. (In the meantime, she had auditioned for and been accepted by the Collegium. Klaus would replace Magdalena as leader, and Anne would take his part.) We had never seen pictures of Uzès before. I had seen fields of Provençal lavender and the Palais des Papes, but never Uzès. Perhaps because the town was right on the edge of Provence, close to the Cévennes, away from the main tourist trails. Administratively speaking, it didn't even belong to Provence any more, but to Languedoc. It had an Italianate tower with latticed sides, a ducal palace flying a red and yellow flag, winding stone streets, and shutters painted in odd greyish shades of blue and green. The main square had covered galleries in warm old stone and was called the Place aux Herbes.

If Anne was homesick, then so, in a way, were we. Her presence made us nostalgic for something we had never known, and indeed rarely thought about until we met her. Ever since Marguerite arrived in Leipzig, Uzès had been as distant as the dark side of the moon - originally for religious reasons; later, while we were still a family of artisans, for financial reasons; and later still, when the Cobbler's Son took over, for reasons having to do with ideological purity. But with Anne sitting beside us in Lili's drawing room, speaking the French she had learned in Uzès, wearing the clothes she had bought there, giving off that faint fragile radiance she had somehow acquired there, the town became more real. And she was as curious about our Huguenot past as we were. Uzès, she told us, had been falling apart until they decided to restore it in the 1960's. The town had lost three-quarters of its population when the Protestants left. Merchants and artisans had fled, trades were no longer

exercised, houses fell into ruin. The Revocation of the Edict of Nantes had been an economic catastrophe.

"How they could leave a town as beautiful as this?" said Lili, gazing pensively at a picture of the Place aux Herbes.

"They had no choice," I told her. "There was a systematic campaign of repression against the Protestants after the Revocation in 1685. Their churches were destroyed, and their children were forcibly baptized as Catholics. Attendance at Mass was made compulsory. Whole villages were terrorized and made to abjure their faith."

Lili sniffed. I knew what she was thinking.

"But the worst thing was the Bibles. For two centuries, Protestants had been used to reading the Bible in their own language. Ever since Luther made the first translation from Latin in the 1520's- "

I could hear myself lecturing. Anne was looking bemused. I got to the point.

"Under the terms of the Revocation, they were obliged to hand over their Bibles. The Word of God was taken away from them. How could they do without it? They had to leave."

"So you're a historian?" said Anne.

"Of a kind," I said. I could see that she was about to ask what I meant - she hadn't been in the DDR long enough to fill in the blanks for herself - so I explained that I taught history at the University of Leipzig, and added that I had written my doctoral thesis on the impact of Huguenot immigrants on the economy of Brandenburg-Prussia. And then, catching Lili's eye, I asked Anne if she would like to take a walk in the park. Anne accepted. Lili smiled benignly.

The park nearest to the flat was the Fockelberg. I went there a lot. It was one of the few places in Leipzig where life had been allowed to develop naturally. The path wound up the hill through unpruned vegetation and luxuriant trees. African wood sculptures from fraternal countries had been set beside the path. Sometimes it gave me the feeling that I was in the jungle. That day, the feeling was particularly strong. Tell me about your family, I said casually, and she did. By the time we had reached the top of the hill, it seemed clear that she was who she said she was. Not even the Stasi could have invented all that.

Since there was no longer any reason to hold back. I invited her to a concert at the Gewandhaus the following Thursday. She agreed without hesitation.

I met her at the door of the concert hall fifteen minutes before the concert was due to begin. When she walked in from Karl-Marx-Platz, the room was suffused with light. She was wearing a long black and red skirt that flowed around her as she moved, and a soft black pullover in some shimmering material that I later learned was mohair. In black, with her blonde hair, she looked more radiant than ever. As we walked across the foyer to take our seats, people turned their heads in covert Leipzig style to look at her.

The first half of the concert was the Tchaikovsky violin concerto. The soloist was a well-known Russian violinist. Anne liked her performance, I didn't. During the interval, we argued cheerfully about the technicalities of the interpretation. When we had said everything there was to say about style and phrasing, Anne eyed me carefully.

"The other day, when you were talking about Protestants, you were really talking about the DDR, weren't you?"

I glanced round, but saw nothing to alarm me.

"What you have to understand," I told her, "is that the Protestants were used to talking face to face to God. When their Bibles were taken away, the conversation was interrupted. They had to move away from France to resume the dialogue."

"I'm sorry, I shouldn't have said that, should I?" She was starting to catch on.

"They couldn't do otherwise." I quoted the humble monk from Wittenberg. "Hier stehe Ich. Ich kann nicht anders. Gott helfe mir."

I was agreeably surprised when she recognized the quotation.

"That's Luther isn't it? At the Diet of Worms?"

"That's what he said to the Emperor when he was ordered to recant. 'Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me.'" I paused for a moment. "Luther was stubborn. All the Protestants were. That was how they survived. Protestants answer only to God, and it gives them a terrible self-confidence."

She looked at me questioningly.

"In France, they were prepared to fight to the death for their right to believe. That was in the sixteenth century. Later, they left the country rather than submit."

"Stop it, Matthias," she said laughing. "I get the point."

"No you don't. We haven't got to the point yet."

"What is the point?"

"I wanted to remind you that I'm a Protestant too. Or, more precisely, that I come of Protestant stock."

Her attention sharpened.

"Stubborn, you mean?"

"Yes. We never let go."

"Not till you get what you want?"

"Yes."

Our eyes met. Anne cast a glance round the foyer.

"Is it a good idea to talk about that here?"

"It would be better to wait till after the concert."

"Where can we go?"

"Will you come home with me?"

"Yes."

The promptness of her response took us both aback. We stared at each other. Anne took a step closer. Instinctively, we lowered our voices.

"Will your aunt still be up?"

"No."

"Will we disturb her?"

"No."

"Then that's all right," she said, and smiled at me.

I was suddenly seized by doubts. "How old are you?"

"Twenty-three."

"And I'm forty-one. I'm nearly twice your age."

"Not quite. Eighteen years' difference, that's all." She studied me for a moment, then added mischievously, "My father was twenty-two when my sister was born."

I flinched. After a pause, I said, "Maybe this isn't such a good idea after all."

"Yes it is," said Anne.

The second half of the concert was something by Brahms and something else by Mozart. I didn't hear a note of either piece. I sat by her side in the darkness, waiting for it to end. At the end of the Brahms, she laid her hand briefly over mine. When the concert was over, we left before the lights went up. On the way to August-Bebel-Strasse, we barely spoke.

The apartment was enormous, with three great rooms overlooking the street, and a lot of smaller ones giving on to the courtyard at the back. A long corridor of polished wood ran the whole length of the apartment, past the music room, past Lili's room, down to my room at the far end of the flat. I had never brought a woman back here before, and I had never noticed how loud two pairs of footsteps sounded at night on those acres of creaking boards. I wasn't sure what Lili would think of this if she heard us. I wasn't sure what I thought of it myself, except that I wanted Anne more than I had ever wanted anyone in my life. I had never married, never even considered it, and now I understood why.

I had decided to marry Anne midway through the third run-through of the Fourth Brandenburg Concerto. I think I thought it might stop her disappearing into the night, and I also had some idea that together she and I could attain the safe, shining, ordered world reflected in the music. Obviously I was wrong. I would have realized this if I had thought about the composer himself, for Bach never wrote anything like the Brandenburgs again. His young wife, Maria Barbara, died shortly after they were completed, and the buoyant spirit that had created the concertos died with her. In any case, the Kantor's safe, stable world was out of reach. It was naive to dream of order and harmony in the shrivelled and disconnected DDR.

Anne and I were married the following June. She obtained permission to remain in the DDR and continue in her job at the Foreign Language Institute. For the next four years, we went on living in Tante Lili's flat, just as I had done when I was single. The housing situation in Leipzig was so bad that it made no sense to look elsewhere, and Lili was afraid that if I went they might make her take in a lodger. I had never understood how Lili had managed to keep the family apartment for her exclusive use, even with the contacts she must have had in some administration somewhere. Lili was getting on for eighty, and at times she looked it. She had lived in this apartment all her life, and I doubted she could survive the intrusion of strangers.

Anne made no objection to living with Lili. Once a year, she went home to France to visit her family and see her academic supervisor. She had begun work on a doctorate on French and German literature. I was never given permission to travel with her, and I never met her parents, though her sister Sophie came once to Leipzig to visit. Every year I wondered if she would decide to stay in France, and every year she came back. She got on well with my friends, and the Collegium was enchanted with her. Sometimes she read Racine to me out loud. French literature was deemed

unnecessary at the Institute - what she taught was linguistics - and she needed to hear her own language in its purest, most literary form. She considered Racine as a sort of neighbour, since he had spent a few months in a village near Uzès in the early 1660s. His route into town went right past her sister's house, and there were a few lines in *Iphigénie* which she claimed had been inspired by that very road.

So I adopted him too, and listened with fellow feeling to the complaints of his rejected kings and anguished lovers. Like them, I knew that I was being betrayed. I knew that Anne was holding something back. There were secrets behind that luminous smile, and I didn't know what they were. She used to disappear without telling me where she was going. I used to find her crying, and she wouldn't tell me why. Sometimes I caught her looking at me in a reflective sort of way. Every time I raised the issue of children, she evaded it. I couldn't get rid of the feeling that she wanted to keep her hands untied for the moment she would decide to leave.

In the summer of 1990, Anne left for France as usual. That year I had intended to go with her. The Wall had fallen the previous autumn, and there was nothing to stop me any more. But two days before we were due to leave, Lili had a heart attack, and I had to stay behind. Anne went home without me. Lili mended slowly. I found an old friend who was willing to look after my aunt, and made plans to join Anne in Uzès towards the middle of the month. But one evening, as I got home from the hospital, the phone rang. It was Sophie calling to tell me that Anne was dead.

SOPHIE

My sister died on a steep stretch of road on the edge of the Cévennes. She was twenty-eight years old. What she was doing on that isolated road between St Jean du Gard and Mialet we never discovered. She had borrowed my car at ten o'clock on a clear summer morning, ostensibly to run an errand in Avignon. When she failed to appear for lunch, we started to wonder where she was, but by the time the gendarmes appeared in the middle of the afternoon, we had scarcely begun to worry. Anne had always been unpredictable. Her car had gone off the road at high speed and plunged into the ravine. It had careened down the slope, overturned, and finally come to a halt at the bottom of the gully. Anne had not been wearing her seatbelt. She had died

instantly of a blow to the head. She had also sustained a broken neck and several other injuries.

At the time of the accident, there were no other cars in the vicinity, and no pedestrians. Two cyclists who had been standing on the Pont des Abarines at the bottom of the valley, admiring Eifel's engineering and the view, heard the roar of the car engine hurtling round the bend, followed by a series of thuds and crashes and the noise of rending undergrowth. What they did not hear was the screech of brakes, and nor were there any signs of brake marks on the road. When my sister realized she had lost control of the car, she had been too scared to react. She had been literally paralyzed with fright. By the time the cyclists toiled up the road on their bikes, the woods were quiet again and the hum of insects had resumed. All they could see from the road was a wide trail of broken ferns and uprooted trees, and a thin wisp of smoke rising from the bottom of the ravine.

Preparing the funeral was a nightmare. My mother was hysterical, and I had never seen my father so shaken. Olivier and I had to do everything. He dealt with the funeral arrangements, and I dealt with the family. Since he was a psychiatrist, it would probably have been better the other way around, but we didn't have the choice. I was the one who had met Matthias, and I was the one who spoke German. It was me who had to call him in Leipzig to tell him what had happened. It was the hardest thing I had ever done in my life. For several minutes, neither of us could speak.

"The funeral," I managed in the end. "We thought next Tuesday. Will that give you time?"

"I won't come to the funeral," he said.

"You won't *come*?"

"I can't, I... Sophie, I..."

"Yes. I understand."

"Forgive me, I We were supposed to go to France together. All that way without her, knowing she... I just.... "

"It's all right. Don't worry."

"Thank you."

"You must come when you can. When you feel like it. Later. When"

"Yes, I will."

I made no attempt to try and change his mind. He was plainly in shock. His aunt was ill. He had never travelled abroad. In the circumstances, it seemed like a

sensible decision. Besides, if the truth be told, I was also relieved. We had enough to do without coping with him too.

I expected him to appear a few months later, when the rawness of the emotion had worn off. But he didn't come. I wrote several times, inviting him to stay with us, but there was never any answer. We heard nothing from him, except for a printed card to say his aunt had died. After a while, I stopped writing. I began to accept that he would never come.

And then, in the spring of 1993, he finally called.

When the phone rang, I was in the studio. The weather was warm, and the window was wide open. It had rained earlier in the day, and the scent of thyme came sharp into my nostrils.

"Sophie?" a voice said hesitantly. "Hier ist Matthias."

"Matthias?" I said incredulously.

"Yes, I... I didn't know.... I didn't want..."

I let him stutter. I had been annoyed by his failure to answer my letters, and saddened too. My eyes met those of the Ambassador across the room. He stared out of the canvas, watching me, waiting to see what I was going to do.

After a moment, Matthias pulled himself together, switched into French, asked how I was, and apologized for his failure to keep in touch. I waited for him to explain why he hadn't answered my letters. Instead, he inquired, in his formal German way, if it would be possible for him to travel to Uzès and pay us a visit.

"Now?" I said.

"Next week."

My first impulse was to tell him he couldn't come. Not any more. Now now. I would have welcomed the chance to see him and talk to him three years ago, but I no longer wanted to do so. Now he belonged to the past. It had taken me a long time to put Anne's death behind me. I did not want to have to deal with this husband of hers, appearing years after the event, opening old wounds, asking unanswerable questions.

But of course I said none of this. The Ambassador gazed at me with his mute ironic smile. With a mixture of foreboding and annoyance, I heard myself inquiring after train times and arranging to pick him up the following Tuesday. Yes, Avignon, the TGV from Paris, and we all looked forward to seeing him.

When I hung up, I remained quite still, with my hand on the receiver, looking out of the window. The hill behind the house was bright with flowers. Matthias was coming. After all this time, he had decided to come to France.

So what on earth had happened to change his mind?

*

He arrived, as he had said, the following week. I went to the station in Avignon to pick him up. When I saw him on the platform, in his worn corduroy trousers and lumpy grey anorak, my heart sank. He looked so old, so lost, so foreign. I led him out to the car park. I had forgotten how big he was. He ambled behind me, looking distractedly this way and that, clutching his cello to his chest. Although it was only April, it was already warm, and he was sweating in his thick winter jacket.

We got into the car and drove out of town. We did not have much to say to each other. It was too soon for me to ask why he had come, and too soon for him to tell me. I inquired about his journey and he commented on the weather. His French was as good as ever. Rounding a bend, we came upon a Judas tree, and he exclaimed in amazement at its dramatic pink blossoms. I told him what it was, and that it flowered at Easter.

"What a strange name," he said. "Why is it called that?"

"It's supposed to be the tree from which Judas Iscariot hung himself. He gave Christ the kiss of betrayal under the Judas tree, and then went back there to kill himself. The reason the blossoms are that colour is that the tree is blushing in shame."

For the rest of our journey to Uzès, the talk was mainly of botany. I pointed out the different trees, and Matthias stared at them in wonder. Olives, almonds, tamarisks, ilex. He had never seen any of them before. After a while, the trees grew sparser, the road straightened out, and we came in sight of Saint Maximin, the village near our house where Anne was buried. I drove up the hill to the cemetery, took him to the grave, and left him alone.

When he came back to the car his face was grey. He didn't say a word. He slumped in his seat and stared at nothing. Fortunately, we weren't far from home. I started the car and drove sedately along the Chemin de Saint Maximin, across the Place de la Concorde, and up the Chemin de Racine to La Capitelle.

La Capitelle was named for the traditional stone-built shepherd's hut at the bottom of the garden. It was a sprawling one-storey house on the side of a hill. It had

been built by my grandmother in the early 1950's. When my grandfather had died, Joséphine had sold the apartment in Paris, and moved south to Uzès, where she had grown up. Her brother Benjamin had an antique shop there. She had designed the house herself, and furnished it with rejects from Benjamin's shop. My parents had lived at La Capitelle before I was born, and stayed on for several months afterwards. I had been coming here since before I could remember. It was the only place I had ever felt at home. When my grandmother had died fourteen years earlier, I had taken it over immediately, even though it was legally my father who was the new owner. I was twenty-two, and I had just got married. Olivier and I bought it off him as soon as we could.

For someone in my profession, it was admittedly not ideal. Insurance cost a fortune. I had had to put a steel door and shutters on Joséphine's old studio, and install a state-of-the-art alarm system to protect the paintings entrusted to me, some of which were valuable. But I could not imagine living anywhere else. I felt that in this house, with my grandmother to watch over me, I might manage to provide my children with the sort of childhood I had not had myself. In another house, in another town, without Joséphine and Racine and the Thief to act as guardian angels, I didn't know if I could do it.

When we were young, Anne and I had spent every summer at La Capitelle. Joséphine used to look after us while our mother was in Germany. It was the only time of year we never fought. We spent our time playing with the other children who were down for the holidays: Pierre, whose parents were restoring an old barn further down the hill; Elodie, whose family had a house on the Chemin de Saint Maximin; Patrick, Marion, Vincent, and the others. One of our favourite games was hide and seek in the garden. Those games would go on for hours. The terrain was ideal, and there was always someone who found the perfect, undiscoverable hiding place. We used to climb up into the trees, crawl under the bushes, hide in the capitelle. When we were small, Anne and I always wanted to sleep in the capitelle. We tried it every summer, and every time the same thing happened. We'd hold out till eleven or so, and then we'd get frightened because of the dark and the noises from the garrigue, and we'd creep off to sleep in the house or on the terrace. The terrace was a good place when it was hot. You could fall asleep looking at the stars. When we were older we used to play hide and seek in the dark, to scare ourselves. Once Anne climbed up into a tree, and when

nobody found her, she began to sing nursery rhymes to herself in German. She said she wasn't as frightened when she could hear the sound of her own voice.

I wondered if she had told Matthias about those games of hide and seek. I looked at him: he was still staring grey-faced through the windscreen.

"You should have come earlier, Matthias," I said.

"I know," he said. "I stayed away on purpose."

He tore his eyes off the windscreen and met my gaze.

"I could have come to the funeral if I'd wanted. My aunt was out of danger at that point. But I didn't want to come. Her death was such a shock, I couldn't have borne it. And afterwards, when the idea began to sink in, I found I still didn't want to. Eventually I told Lili what had happened. I had to, she was beginning to ask where Anne was. She said I should come and visit you, but I didn't want to. As long as I hadn't come here, as long as I hadn't seen her grave, I could go on believing that she was still alive, somewhere in France, out of my reach, but alive. I didn't want to believe that she was dead."

We turned into the driveway of La Capitelle. I didn't know what to say. I parked the car under the trees next to Olivier's Peugeot. There were two other cars there that I didn't recognize. I looked at them speculatively. Who had he brought home this time? I helped Matthias get his luggage out of the boot and led him through the trees towards the house. As we rounded the corner, I heard him gasp.

La Capitelle grew out of the garrigue. The trees pressed so close around it that you couldn't tell it was there until you came upon it. Below the terrace, the ground fell away into a tangle of vegetation, a vertiginous mass of different greens. Gorse, laurel, California pines, acacia, hibiscus, shot through, at this time of year, with splashes of yellow coronilles and purple irises, and the deep pink of the blossom on the Judas tree at the corner of the terrace. My grandmother had never tried to create a formal garden. Everything had always been left to run more or less wild. She said it was more interesting to paint. She had painted the view from the terrace dozens of times, from different angles, at different times of year, experimenting with different colours and styles and textures. Some of those paintings were still stacked in the studio. I had hung the one I liked best in the sitting room. It showed a corner of the terrace, with the ground dropping steeply away beneath it, a shuttered window, and a chair with a towel hanging over the back. Ochre and lavender and a mass of different

greens. *Summer, late afternoon, La Capitelte*, said the note she had scribbled on the back.

The garden remained as it was in Joséphine's time. We pruned things back when they looked like swallowing up the house. It was Olivier who did most of the pruning, venting his frustrations in a burst of physical activity when a project went awry, or he failed to help a patient. My husband was not ambitious in the usual sense. Becoming a professor or a department head in a big hospital was not what he wanted. He was content to stay at the local psychiatric hospital in Uzès, dealing with teenagers who refused to go to school because the toilets were poisoned, and postal workers who were convinced their colleagues were plotting against them.

Olivier's mission in life was to help people. Anyone, everyone, it didn't matter who. He needed to feel he had made things better for them. When he was young, just out of medical school, he had found himself for several months in a situation where he was supposed to help, and couldn't. The experience had shaken him to the core, and he had been working hard to make up for it ever since. People who could not be accommodated in his appointments book, his theatre workshops, or his youth centres were invited to his home. I didn't always care too much for this, but I had come to accept it. It was part of the package. If I wanted Olivier, I had to take his lame ducks too. It was only fair, he pointed out, since I had once been one myself. In fifteen years of marriage, I had got into the habit of feeding stray cats, giving coins to the homeless, receiving misfits at home for dinner, and listening to their accounts of why the world was against them.

Tonight, his guests were not lame ducks. They were people I knew. Gérard ran a theatre workshop at the psychiatric hospital, Chantal, his wife, was a teacher, and Suzy was the receptionist from the Centre Médico-Psychiatrique. I was delighted to see them. Gérard would talk about Freud and psychodrama and cultural role-playing, Suzy would supply us with the high points of local gossip, and Chantal would describe the latest iniquities of the Ministry of Education. Not one of them would have anything interesting to say, but at least they wouldn't talk about Anne. The prospect of a strained, silent meal with Matthias receded.

"Wasn't this a good idea?" said Olivier. "You haven't seen Gérard and Chantal for weeks, and I know Matthias will be interested to hear about our new workshop."

I let him take charge. While he plied everyone with wine and pastis in the sitting room, I stayed in the kitchen and made an apple tart.

"Maman, what are you making?" said Martin, coming in from the terrace in airplane mode, with his arms spread dangerously wide.

"No planes in here," I said automatically. "Put it in the hangar. It's a tarte aux pommes."

Martin lowered his arms to his side and considered this carefully. "It's a school night. You never make dessert on a school night."

"Tonight we have guests."

"You never make dessert when we have guests."

This of course was true. Lame ducks did not rate dessert, and neither did most of Olivier's friends. "Tonight Matthias is here," I said virtuously.

"Matthias is here," repeated Martin, and went over to the glass-paned door that separated the kitchen from the living room to verify the assertion. Olivier and his guests were sitting in a semi-circle round the fire. He and Gérard were arguing about their next play, Suzy and Chantal were evaluating the comparative merits of local pâtisseries, and Matthias was sitting a little apart, staring blankly into his pastis. "Why is Matthias here, Maman?"

This was a question that Olivier and I had discussed at length during the past few days, without reaching any satisfactory conclusion.

I looked at my son uncertainly. "He's come to see Anne's grave. And to see us."

"Why has he come now?"

"I don't know. He's a teacher, you know. I expect he was too busy to come before."

"Teachers are busy," agreed Martin, who was in his second year of primary school and floored already by the amount of homework he was expected to do. "Why does he want to see her grave?"

"Because he hasn't seen it before. When you see someone's grave it helps you to realize that they are really dead, and then you can... it's easier... you start to...."

"Is he going to take her back to Germany with him?"

Martin didn't really know what death was yet, and I suspected he hadn't got much notion about Germany either. Fortunately, Alice breezed in. Alice was ten, and she had all the answers.

"Of course he isn't. He can't. She's buried here."

"He can dig her up. I'll help him."

"You'd have to go to the graveyard at dead of night. You can't do that, you'd be too scared."

"No I wouldn't. I'm not scared."

"You're scared of the Maison du Voleur," said Alice contemptuously. "You'd never dare to go into the graveyard at night."

"We could go in the afternoon. You can see better during the day."

"It's forbidden to dig people up. You have to do it when no one can see you." Martin's face fell. Alice prepared to twist the knife. "In any case, how would he take her back to Germany? You can't take a coffin on the train."

"He can take her in his car."

"He hasn't got one. Maman said he came all the way by train."

"He can put her in that thing he has for his violin."

"It's not a violin, it's a cello."

"She'd fit in there. He can take her out of the coffin. I expect he brought it with him on purpose."

"Nonsense," said Alice, "he takes that everywhere. He can't be separated from it. Anne said so. He'll probably play it soon, and then you'll be able to hear what a cello sounds like, Martin."

MATTHIAS

The evening went past in a blur. People came and went without ever quite coming into focus. There was a tall, amiable man who was Sophie's husband Olivier, another man and two women whose names I immediately forgot, and two dark, sharp-eyed children who were recognizable - just - from Anne's old photographs. They talked and laughed among themselves: sometimes they asked me questions and tried to include me in the conversation, but I was incapable of responding. In the end, I made my excuses and went upstairs before supper was finished. I could barely stay awake to get undressed. I fell into a deep sleep as soon as my head touched the pillow.

When I awoke again, the room was dark. There was no light anywhere, inside or out. For a moment I thought I was back in Leipzig. I lay without moving, disquieted by the absence of the sodium glare from the streetlights and the noise of the

cars on the street outside my window. Then I heard the music, coming from somewhere inside the house.

I recognized it at once. It was the Air on a G-string from Bach's Suite in D-major. Not the way Anne had played it on her violin the day she first came to tea, but a full orchestral version. This was the way it would have sounded when Bach's Collegium Musicum played it at Zimmermann's coffee house in Leipzig two hundred and fifty years ago. I lay in the dark and listened. Finding Bach in that strange house was like finding a friend. The Air moved inexorably on, with the bass progressing constantly in great steps, and the soft tunes of the high strings flowing around it. Anne had listened to it a lot during her last year in Leipzig. Once she had said that it made her think of a ship sailing on a deep black baroque sea, breasting the waves of life with dignity and sadness, ploughing its way towards inevitable death. The music marked a pause, and then started up again. It was deep with resignation, but no anguish. There was nothing to be done, no way to interrupt the ship's course, nor turn it aside from certain ruin. You had to let yourself go where it took you and accept your fate.

It had been Werner's idea that I should go to France.

"Talk to her sister, meet her parents, see what you can piece together. One of them must have known something."

"But, Werner, I don't even know them."

"Then it's time you did."

"I really don't want to go."

"I think you must."

"But what's the point?"

"You need to know the truth."

"What can they tell me?"

"That's what you need to ask. You'll regret it all your life if you don't go now."

I had known Werner since we were children. He was a few years older than me, and I looked on him as an elder brother as well as a friend. In my eyes, he had always possessed a certain moral authority. Part of it had been inherited from his father the pastor, and part of it derived from his years of political opposition to the regime: first the Peace Movement, then his environmental group, and finally the Monday demonstrations that had brought down the DDR. His moral ascendancy had

been further reinforced by the unfortunate matter of IM Sebastian. I was ill-equipped to resist him, and he knew it.

SOPHIE

When I heard Matthias was coming, I had made a list of the places he would want to go to, and the people he would want to meet. My father in Uzès, my mother in Avignon, the cemetery, the crash site. Maybe some sightseeing: he was a historian after all. And then there were the Protestant ancestors. I had thought there would be plenty to keep him occupied for a week or so. But I had reckoned without my family.

When he learned what was afoot, my father announced that he was going to be away at an antiques fair in Paris, and my mother claimed to be busy with choir rehearsals. Easter was coming, she said, she was run off her feet, the choir was preparing the St. John Passion, the first performance was a week on Sunday and, quite frankly, Sophie, it was a bit of a cheek for Matthias to show up with no warning and expect everyone to fit in with him. I hung up before she could start telling me that no one ever thought about what she wanted, and reflected grimly that as usual Olivier and I would have to do everything.

As it turned out, I was wrong. On the evening Matthias arrived, Olivier produced a whole list of commitments I had known nothing about. On Wednesday he was going to see his supervisor in Nîmes, on Thursday he had arranged to meet two unemployed teenagers he had taken under his wing, and on Friday he was going to his theatre workshop in Avignon.

I stopped in the middle of rinsing a saucepan. The guests had gone, the children were asleep, Matthias had been settled in the spare room, and we were clearing up the kitchen.

"In other words, you're going out every night this week? Can't you cancel anything?"

"Of course I can't," said Olivier patiently. "You know that."

"What about the workshop?"

"Sophie. It wouldn't be fair to the others."

"Matthias is going to think you're avoiding him."

"Of course I'm not avoiding him. But I have prior commitments."

"Olivier," I said, "you're doing too much. I've hardly seen you for weeks. It's not fair to me either. Or to the children."

"Hm." He looked at me narrowly. Olivier spent a great deal of his life trying to be fair. "Perhaps you're right. I'll try and cut down when we get back from skiing."

"Skiing? When are you going skiing?"

"Darling, we're leaving next Monday. Have you forgotten?"

"Oh. Yes. Actually, I had. I'd forgotten all about it." I leaned against the sink and looked at him blankly. I had been so busy worrying about Matthias, that all thoughts of the annual ski trip had been chased out of my mind. "So you're all going off to the Alps and leaving me with Matthias?"

He raised an eyebrow. "Well, unless you want to come?"

"No, I don't. With all that snow, not likely."

Olivier laughed. He had known what I would say. "You'll be all right with Matthias. He seems like a nice person."

Olivier said that about everyone.

"We still don't know why he's come," I pointed out.

Bach drifted in from the sitting room. Olivier wiped carefully round the inside of a salad bowl. "I've been wondering about that. Do you think she had another man? That he just found out about?"

"Anne? Of course not! Why would you think that?"

"He's clearly very upset. You must have noticed."

"Yes, of course I have. But it can't be that."

"I just wondered- "

"And even if it was, why would he come here?"

He went on wiping diligently. "The lover could have been here."

"That's impossible! We'd have known about it."

"We never did find out what she was doing at St. Jean du Gard that day."

"She had a schoolfriend who lived up there."

"No one came forward after the accident."

"I distinctly remember her going up there several times when she was young."

Olivier put the bowl down on the counter.

"So you don't think it's that?"

"Of course it's not. Look, Olivier, I know you didn't like Anne, but that's no reason to-"

"Of course I liked Anne. Though she had her little quirks."

"She was crazy about Matthias. There can't have been anyone else! She was so depressed when she first got to Leipzig, and then she met him and Lili and it all changed completely. Don't you remember the letters she used to write?"

ANNE

17 October 1985

Dear Sophie,

Today I went to tea with Matthias, the cellist, and his aunt. They live in an old residential area that must have been built around 1900. Unlike the centre of Leipzig, it was hardly bombed in the war. There are some wonderful old buildings, though they're all terribly run down. It looks as though nothing has been painted since 1939! The Girardets' apartment is like nothing I've ever seen before, at least not here. It has five rooms plus kitchen and bathroom, which is palatial by DDR standards - and what rooms! The ceilings are fifteen feet high with Art Nouveau mouldings. Tante Lili, Fräulein Girardet, I suppose I should say, was brought up there as a child, and so was Matthias. It was Lili who brought him up: his parents were killed in the bombing when he was a baby.

When I arrived for tea, I was shown into what I can only describe as a drawing room. Old oak furniture, Persian rugs, lace tablecloths, tea in a silver teapot. Everything a little down-at-heel, holes in the rugs and in the tablecloth, but still! I could feel my jaw dropping: it wasn't what I'd been expecting, but I don't think either of them noticed. I suppose they're so used to living like this that they don't realize that it isn't how things are done in the rest of the DDR! Matthias teaches history at the university, and between that and his music, I don't think he pays much attention to current events. Socially inactive, as they say here. Gesellschaftlich inaktiv. Music is the family passion. Tante Lili used to be a singer, and so did Matthias' mother. Lili was the one who introduced her brother Stefan to her good friend Eva, and it was love at first sight - or so Lili claims! Stefan played the piano, and his piano still stands in the music room, but although he played very well, he wasn't allowed to turn

professional. His father was a lawyer, and Stefan was forced to join the family law firm.

Sitting there, in that room, I felt as if I had gone fifty years back in time. No, more than that, a hundred. I felt as if I was back in the Kaiser's time, and I'd come here from Paris in an airship. I wouldn't have been at all surprised to see horse-drawn carriages clip-clopping past the window down the August-Bebel-Strasse, and maybe a housemaid coming in to light the lamps! I've caught glimpses of this old-established Leipzig bourgeoisie once or twice before. Silke told me they existed, and I've spotted them at the theatre and the opera, with their distinguished manners and their ancient evening clothes, but they only come out for culture, and I couldn't imagine where they hid during the day. So that's one mystery solved!

The odd thing is that Matthias and Lili, for all their anachronistic ways, are somehow more real than Silke and the people at the Institute. All Silke's speeches about self-criticism and self-improvement seem to imply that, wherever her society is going, it hasn't got there yet, and what's more, it's beginning to worry that it never will. Yet the Girardets in their little niche have a self-assurance, a sense of belonging, that the others don't possess. I feel as though I've stepped through the looking glass and entered the real Leipzig.

Anyway, we had tea, and they asked me about Uzès and about myself and my family. After the third cup, I was thinking I should probably get up and go, but I had my violin with me, and Tante Lili insisted that I should play something for her. Matthias seemed quite keen on the idea too - my audition for the Collegium isn't till Tuesday, but I suppose he was thinking he might as well check me out first - so I played part of the Brahms violin concerto which I've been working on, and then, realizing that I was about to audition for a group which plays only baroque music, I played Bach's Air on a G-String, and Matthias joined in on the cello halfway through. Sophie, it was amazing! I've never played so well with anyone before. We seemed to know instinctively what the other was going to do, even though we had never played together before: there were no hesitations, no stumbling. Obviously, the result wasn't perfect: the piece isn't meant for only two instruments, and it would have needed the whole Collegium to make it sound the way it should. Still, when we finished, it was almost dark, and we sat there, the three of us, for at least a minute before anyone spoke. And then Lili leant forward and touched my knee and said it was her favourite

piece of music and I had played wonderfully, and she was very grateful, and she hoped I would come again.

SOPHIE

My Great-Aunt Emmanuelle was eighty-five and lived fifty miles away, but she still thought nothing of driving across the country in her frightful old Citroen to see what we were getting up to behind her back. Emmanuelle was Joséphine's cousin. She came bumbling across the garden in the middle of the afternoon, wearing an ancient fisherman's sweater with her good tweed skirt, and was entranced to discover that we had been hiding secrets from her. Anne's husband, no less! The man she had been waiting eight years to meet, she announced, as she stumped round Matthias and scrutinized him from all angles. I expected Matthias to be embarrassed but, to my surprise, he laughed. Later he explained that she reminded him of his own aunt, Tante Lili, who had also seen old age as the perfect excuse to say whatever she wanted.

"I've been wondering about you, Matthias," she informed him. "You're the thirteenth apostle, aren't you? The one who took Judas' place?"

"Er, yes, I believe I am."

"And a Protestant too?" Emmanuelle liked to get people's religious antecedents straight. She was the daughter of a schoolteacher with a passion for the classics and a devoutly Catholic mother. She had married a museum curator, moved to Nîmes, and raised six children. When her husband died, she returned alone to her girlhood home in Anduze and devoted her energy to the study of Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic, the languages of the Bible. The last time I had visited her, the table in her living room had been piled high with translations of the Old Testament. Two were Catholic, one was Protestant and one was Jewish. When one compared them, she explained, one noticed enormous differences of meaning on some quite important points. And at that point, of course, one had no choice but to go back to the original.

"Protestant?" said Matthias dubiously. "Well I don't know about that."

It was the right answer. In some archaic corner of Emmanuelle's mind, the Wars of Religion were still going on, and the world was still classified as Protestant or

Catholic. "Good," she said, and peered at him more closely. "Now, I've seen you before somewhere, haven't I?"

"I don't think that's possible. This is my first time in France."

"Really?" said Emmanuelle. "You certainly took your time." She went on peering. "What did you say your surname was?"

"Girardet."

"Well yes of course it is. I shall have to think about that. Now, Sophie," she commanded, "take me to the Ambassador."

"He's in the studio," I said, and ushered her inside.

The Ambassador looked down at us from the big easel next to the window.

"He's come on a lot," said Emmanuelle. "You've been working hard."

The Ambassador's name was Mehemed Jaid, and he had been the emissary to France of the Sublime Porte. He had visited Uzès in 1741, on his way to take ship for Constantinople. He had ridden through the town on horseback, and attended a ball in the Duché, the ducal palace. Mehemed Jaid had dark, haunting eyes and a rueful, worldly, slightly mocking smile. His portrait had been painted by a local artist, who had sketched him during the visit. He sat on his horse, wearing his Turkish robes, under a pair of arching, russet-green trees. Behind him, the countryside snaked away into the distance under a cloudy blue-grey sky. The portrait had been painted at a time when people believed that the universe was regimented by global harmony. The seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries had been a watershed between the world dominated by God of the Middle Ages, and the world dominated by Man of the Enlightenment. By 1741, things were beginning to change, but the new shift towards sensibility and simplicity had not yet got as far as Uzès. Everything in the painting spoke of Order and Balance and Stability. The only false note was the smile of Mehemed Jaid. He had seen other landscapes, and he knew too much. He certainly knew better than to believe in Harmony and Reason.

Emmanuelle had found him six months earlier in a junk shop in Arles. The paint had been flaking so badly that in places the canvas was visible. I had cleaned the painting, glued back the flaking paint, and retouched the rest. I had finished the Ambassador himself and most of the background: all that was left was a corner of the sky.

"That's a most intriguing smile," said Emmanuelle. "What is he thinking about, would you say?"

"I've been wondering that," I said.

In the course of the dinner at the Duché, someone had asked the Ambassador why his religion authorized polygamy, and he had replied that, in his country, it took many women to unite the qualities that in France are present in one alone. I couldn't decide whether this was simply his practised all-purpose diplomatic response, or whether a part of him really believed what he said. I couldn't decrypt the meaning of that smile. Sometimes I lay awake thinking about it at night, after Olivier had come in late and gone to sleep. Did he mean all the women in France, or only some of them?

"Simon's coming down for Easter," said Emmanuelle. "I'd like to have it back by then to show him."

Simon was her eldest son, an eminent Ottoman historian. My work was nearly finished: I couldn't refuse.

"All right," I said. "I'll bring him back next week."

"Good," said Emmanuelle. "Come on Tuesday. In the afternoon, not too early. Say about four, and we'll have a cup of tea. You too, Matthias, I'll be expecting you. I'll have sorted it out by then."

*

"What will she have sorted out?" said Olivier, at breakfast next day.

"Where she's seen Matthias before."

"She can't have seen Matthias before."

"I assume she knows that. That's why she has to sort it out."

"What time is Matthias getting up, Maman?"

"I don't know, Martin. He's on holiday."

"Tomorrow, I'll be on holiday too."

"Yes, and then you're going skiing."

"Maman, where's my black T-shirt? I need it to take to school today."

"It's in the wash, Alice."

"But I need it! I've got my dance class."

"Well you should have told me, shouldn't you?"

"I'll borrow yours then, shall I?"

"Certainly not. Just wear another colour."

"Has he told you why he's come yet?" said Olivier.

"No," I said, "he's still getting up his nerve."

Matthias had been here for two days now, and we were all getting used to each other. Shambling round the house, he made me think of a tame bear. Sometimes he watched me while I worked, and sometimes he went off on his own errands. When I had suggestions, he fell in with them: when I did not, he kept himself occupied. He spent a lot of time prowling round the studio, examining its contents: the shelves of files and documentation, the canvases in varying stages of completion stacked against the wall, the trolley table spread with a variety of pots and bottles, solvents and varnishes, paintbrushes and scalpels. He was particularly intrigued by the headset binoculars for examining fine work, the lamp to reproduce daylight, and a number of items I had purloined from the dental profession.

I had been preparing to drive him round the countryside from Nîmes to Alès, inspecting Roman ruins and Protestant strongholds, but he seemed to have little enthusiasm for sightseeing, and after a while I stopped proposing things. He was more self-sufficient than I had thought. He seemed happy just to wander round the garden, eyeing the shrubs in the garden and the members of his dead wife's family with the same shy curiosity, and recovering from whatever unpleasant experiences had driven him out of Leipzig. He was obviously unhappy - Olivier had been right about that - though I still didn't see why it should have anything to do with Anne. The weather was fine and warm, and he spent a lot of time just sitting in the sun. The cat jumped on his knees at every opportunity, and they had long one-sided conversations in German. Maybe he was telling Britannicus what he couldn't yet bring himself to tell us. Sometimes he went for walks: up towards Uzès, or else to Saint Maximin. As Alice had predicted, he played the cello every day.

MATTHIAS

On the terrace of La Capitelle, the Cello Suites did not sound the same as in the music room at home. Out in the garrigue, the music had an edge and vigour it had never attained in the sedate bourgeois environment of August-Bebel-Strasse. I had never played like this before. It elated and frightened me. Sitting on the terrace, suspended in the trees that surrounded the house, I had the sense of being afloat between earth and sky. Perched on the stone bench under the Judas tree, I drew the bow back and forth across the strings, as I had done for years, and the sound that emerged was totally

different. Was the cello feeling the change of climate? Was the instrument reacting to the difference in temperature and humidity? Or was the change in me: in my fingers, my muscles, my brain, my heart?

I had never imagined that France would be like this. Travelling south from Paris on the train, I had been dazzled by the brightness of the light and the colours of the landscape. Once past Valence, the sun shone more strongly, the trees burst into flower, and we went from winter into spring. The sun gleamed on soft new leaves and the uneven, ruffled waters of the Rhône. I glimpsed the distant blue shape of mountains. I wondered whether Jacques and his family had passed through here on their way east in 1687, but decided they had not. They were headed for Geneva, farther east. I was entranced by the rounded curves of the hills, the lush profusion of vegetation, the swirls of pink and yellow blossom. The train streaked through a town of low-roofed ochre houses, too fast for me to read the name in the station, and I was swept by a sudden wave of euphoria. Years ago in Leipzig, walking past a bombed-out building on my way to work, I had seen a message that said: *Zahme Vögel singen von Freiheit, Wilde Vögel fliegen*. It hadn't stayed there long, of course - by evening they had cleaned it off - but it had stuck in my mind ever since. *Tame birds sing of freedom, wild birds fly*. They had tried to keep us in, but we had got away from them in the end. I was no longer a tame bird singing of freedom, I was a wild bird flying. For a while, I forgot the reason I had come.

My euphoria lasted no further than the cemetery in Saint Maximin. Seeing the grave was a shock. The graveyard lay on the edge of the village, halfway down the hill. The houses above it were shuttered against the sun. Below it, the plain stretched into the distance, heavy with vines and olives. It was very quiet. The headstone of the grave was black marble, and the inscription contained nothing but her name and the dates of her birth and death. *Anne Coste Girardet, 1962-1990*. I stared at it in bafflement. So this was it? This was all? There was nothing more than this to show for a life? Not even a banal stone tribute from her family - beloved sister, regretted daughter? Where was the texture of her days, the people she had known, the things she had loved? Where, above all, were the answers to my questions?

The days that followed made it plain that I had travelled here for nothing. Sophie and Olivier were hospitable but uninformative. They told me nothing, and they asked no questions. It didn't seem to occur to them that I might have come here for a reason. As for Anne's parents, they were nowhere to be seen. Her father was

away, and her mother was busy. What had happened to Anne in Leipzig was of no importance here. I asked about Anne's friends, but Sophie didn't know where they were. Or even, for that matter, who they were. But in any case, they had moved away from Uzès. One of them was thought to have gone to Egypt. Another worked maybe in Paris. There was a girl, Sophie was pretty sure, who had lived somewhere near the scene of the accident, but she didn't know her name and they had never tracked her down.

My courage began to fail me. I began to feel I had had no business to pursue her here. I should have left her to sleep in peace. My visits to Saint Maximin left me increasingly bemused. There was never anyone in the cemetery. The houses above the graveyard seemed to be permanently shuttered. *Anne Coste Girardet, 1962-1990.* The marble was warm to the touch. I sat on the neighbouring vault and looked at it. In Leipzig, she had always been cold, perpetually searching for sweaters. But now she had come home to sleep in the sun, lulled by the wind from the garrigue, overlooked by houses whose shutters were the colour of thyme and lavender.

I felt more and more like an intruder. Once I walked up into the village, and went in search of Racine, who had stayed there three centuries earlier. The house where his uncle had lived was still standing, but a high wall hid it from view. I retreated ignominiously down the hill. What I was doing in this remote hill village? Why had I followed her here? If I hadn't understood her in Leipzig, what chance did I have of deciphering her secrets in a place where everything was strange to me?

More than once I was on the verge of opening my mouth and asking Sophie to drive me back to the station in Avignon, but that was impossible. I had waited too long to visit Anne's family, and they would be hurt and upset if I ran away from them now. Whatever it cost me, I had to stick it out. So I rambled around the garrigue, and visited Uzès, and tried to discover some traces of my ancestor Jacques, and played the cello. Sophie proposed various sightseeing trips, but I turned her down. I had no heart for such things. After a while she stopped making suggestions, and said that, if I didn't mind, she might as well get on with some work.

I liked Sophie more than I had expected. During her visit to Leipzig six years earlier, she had been silent and ill-at-ease, unsure what to make of Lili and me, and our grey socialist surroundings. In her own environment, she was more accessible. After a day or two of awkward silences, we began to talk as she worked. Her studio was a large, pleasant room adjacent to the house. Light flooded in through a vast

north-facing window. In one corner was an imposing portrait of a Turk on horseback that Sophie greeted each morning with a respectful "Good morning, Your Excellency." Three more paintings were placed flat on a trestle table, and Sophie moved from one to another in turn, spreading wax-based adhesive on to a green Cubist painting of a cat with the household iron, applying a layer of varnish to an Impressionist painting of Paris, so that suddenly the outlines were sharp and the colours stood out, glueing back flaking paint onto a sixteenth-century portable altarpiece with a paintbrush and a bowl of glue she had warmed in the microwave. When she had finished with the altarpiece, she placed a plastic sheet over the painting to protect it, weighted down the sheet with an old sock full of tiny lead balls, heaved a sigh of relief, and told me a story about how she had once had to put back flaking paint on to a fake fifteenth-century Italian painting with a rolling pin.

I had started to tell her about the DDR, as she glued and varnished and cleaned, sensing that I had better prepare her for the revelations to come. At some point I was going to have to explain what had happened, and why I was here. I had no idea how Sophie was going to take it. She seemed to have little to say about Anne. While not avoiding the subject, she was not forthcoming. I knew, of course, that the sisters had not got on well during their childhood. Judging by what Anne had said, Sophie's behaviour had at times bordered on persecution. While this had no longer rankled with Anne, at least by the time I met her, I could understand that Sophie might feel uneasy about it now. Anne had observed philosophically that Sophie's behaviour was normal in the circumstances, but Sophie might not see it like that. Especially now Anne was dead.

Of the rest of the family, I saw much less, since they were out all day. The children and I had little to say to each other, but I listened to them talk to their mother. Martin amused me. He was a dreamy child, still on the edge of babyhood, living in a parallel world where adult logic did not obtain. Alice, on the other hand, I found perplexing. She was too grown-up and self-possessed for the child's body she still inhabited. I didn't know what to make of her, all the more since she sometimes reminded me almost unbearably of Anne. As for Olivier, I had hardly seen him. He had been out nearly every evening since I arrived. Sophie was plainly irritated by his absences, but the children seemed to take them for granted.

With no one else to talk to, I questioned the city. Uzès was the town where Anne had spent the first sixteen years of her life, until her parents divorced and she

went to live in Avignon with her mother. It boasted the title of 'Première Duché de France' (a matter of precedence, not size), and the town had grown up around an impressive ducal palace, which was also called the Duché. I walked the narrow streets searching for clues, but I found no answers. The city reflected everything, it explained nothing. It threw back Anne's mirror image in my face. Uzès was an intricate maze of winding alleys, piled-up houses, Renaissance archways, mediaeval courtyards. There were ledges, balconies, terraces and galleries. There were the grey-green, grey-blue shutters I had seen on Anne's postcards, lying flat against the ochre walls. There were passages that doubled back on themselves and joined up in unexpected corners. There were huge iron gates leading into tiny courtyards, and doors set at odd angles in the walls. Fountains played where you least expected them, and trees overhanging high stone walls suggested the existence of hidden gardens. It felt like a town of deception and betrayal. In some places, there was an almost mediaeval silence; in others you could hear the rumble of traffic a few widths of stone away. Uzès was as mysterious and closed as Anne herself. For outsiders like myself, there was nothing to learn.

2. DARK STARS

ANNE

What I missed most when I moved to Germany was La Capitelle. More than the family apartment in Uzès where I had grown up, more than my mother's flat in Avignon where I had spent my teenage years. La Capitelle was a different universe, another country. It had its own topography, its own semi-legendary residents, its own mythology. Racine himself had walked past the garden wall. He had probably even crossed the Place de la Concorde - which wasn't really a Place at all, but only a large open space where three roads met. It had been christened by Joséphine, and Sophie and I had taken up the name immediately. We thought it sounded glamorous and remote. Later, we had glimpsed the original, on a rainy, half-term trip to Paris, and been unimpressed. "Personally, I don't care much for obelisks," said Sophie.

There was only one house on the Place itself, and that was the Maison du Voleur. The Thief's House. Because of its high walls, nothing much of it was visible, apart from a single round window set high up overlooking the Place. We found it distinctly odd that the house should have just that one tiny window. No, more than odd: sinister. (It was years before it occurred to us that the architect had put all the windows on the south side of the house, overlooking the pool.) We deduced that the house and its occupants were up to no good. When it was getting dark and the round window was lit up, we knew that the Thief was inside, watching through his eyehole, and we had to tiptoe past as quietly as possible in case he heard us. But if the window was dark, that was even scarier, because it meant he was out on the prowl somewhere - "looking for human flesh," asserted Sophie - so then we had to grab each other's hands and run as fast as we could until we were safely round the corner on the Chemin de Saint Maximin where Élodie lived.

Élodie was Sophie's age, five years older than me. Sometimes the older children played with us, and sometimes they went off on their own. Once they tried to persuade us that Élodie had hypnotised Sophie. Sophie closed her eyes and Élodie led her round the garden. I knew right away it wasn't true, but I didn't say anything. I stood there and watched with the others. They weren't sure if they were being taken in or not. In the end, Sophie had to pretend to fall into the swimming pool with all her clothes on to convince them. I never told Sophie I had seen through their game. Even

though she was usually nice to me in the summer at Joséphine's when our mother was away in Germany, she was so horrid during the rest of the year at our flat in Uzès that I never entirely trusted her.

It took me a long time to see that it was our mother who caused all the trouble between Sophie and me. I didn't understand until I was seventeen, and Sophie got married. Olivier, her husband, was a few years older than she was, and he was studying psychiatry. One day, he and I found ourselves alone on the terrace at La Capitelle after a trying lunch with my mother, who was in a particularly self-pitying mood that day. She and Sophie were in the kitchen washing up. I had come outside to wipe down the table and was about to go back and join them when Olivier said,

"You know, Anne, if you need to get away, you can always come here."

"Get away?"

"I mean, from your mother."

"Oh, but I get on fine with my mother."

"You don't find her a little overwhelming at times?"

"Oh no, when you know her she isn't overwhelming at all. My mother hasn't had an easy life- "

"So I gathered."

"- and you need to make allowances. She grew up during the war and her family were very unfeeling and acted very inconsiderately, and then my father and Sophie- " I broke off. I was talking much too fast. "Besides, I don't get on very well with Sophie either, you know. I couldn't possibly come here."

"Don't you think you might get on better with Sophie if your mother wasn't there to stir things up?" said Olivier, quite kindly.

I stared at him blankly. "What on earth do you mean by that?"

He repeated a remark my mother had made less than half an hour earlier.

"Sophie, you never bother to consider my feelings, do you? It just never crosses your mind. Anne is the only one who supports me, aren't you Anne? Du bist mein bester Freund."

"Freundin," I corrected, and blushed bright red. "Well yes, but Sophie, you see, the thing is, and I- "

"You're her daughter, not her friend," said Olivier quietly.

"Yes, but my mother and I are very alike, and we- "

"Are you?" said Olivier.

I was so shocked that I didn't know what to say. My mother had been telling me all my life that she and I were alike. No one had ever contradicted her. No one had even cast doubt on her assertions. Olivier's scepticism brought me up short. I didn't know how to deal with it. I couldn't argue, and I certainly couldn't agree. In the end I was rude to him. It was the only thing I could think of. I told him he didn't know anything, he was only a student, it was nothing to do with him, and he should mind his own business. Then I grabbed up the sponge and stalked off inside the house and left him alone on the terrace.

Olivier never broached the subject again. But he had only been trying to help, and I don't think he ever forgave me that childish little outburst. Relations were always strained between us after that.

Of course, what he said was absolutely true. Speaking German to me had created a bond my mother had never had with Sophie. My mother taught me to read, she taught me to count, she read me stories by the hour. Later, she took me on Picknicks, made clothes for my Puppen and organized Ausflüge. Sophie, of course, did not look on this with favour. She was jealous of the attention I got that she did not, and of the conversations in a language she couldn't understand. When I prattled on in a mixture of French and German about the time my Mutti had been to Berlin with her Vati when she was a little girl and eaten Eiskrem at a café on Unter den Linden, Sophie would kick me viciously under the table. When I told the story of Hänsel und Gretel und die böse Hexe, Sophie would pull my hair, while my father would yawn and retreat into his catalogues.

Slowly I came to realize that my mother had split the family in two. It was just as Olivier said. On the one side, her and me, jabbering away in German, on the other, my father and Sophie, drawn together by Sophie's interest in art. Joséphine had always tried to avoid taking sides, but there was no getting around the fact that it was in her studio that Sophie had learned to draw. When I was little, I bitterly resented the fact that Sophie was allowed to go to Joséphine's house every Thursday afternoon to play in the garden and draw pictures. "You're too small to draw," said Sophie. "In any case, I doubt you'll ever be an artist. You don't have the right shape of hands. Papa said so. All you can do is talk German."

When I was small, I used to follow my mother round the house, occasionally enfolding her legs, which were all I could reach, in a heartfelt embrace, and assuring her at intervals that, "Du bist *meine* Mutti." This was the kind of uncritical affection

my mother had been looking for all her life. I became her ally from the time I could talk. She relied on me to take her side in every family argument. To do otherwise was to let her down. "Oh no, Anne, surely you don't want to go to Joséphine's with Sophie? You're not going to leave me all alone, are you?" "Oh no, Anne, surely you don't agree with your father too? You're not all going to gang up against me, are you?"

My mother's reproaches were too much to handle, and the compensations for disappointing her too few. My father would observe the exchange with his usual indifference, and Sophie would pinch me whatever I did. In the treacherous cross-currents of our family's living room, I was safer with my mother. My place was with her, and my role was to support her. It was the only way to fit in. As I grew older, I developed my own ways of dealing with my mother, and I kept to them. By the time I was seventeen, it was too late to change

When I met Matthias, I was drawn to him at once. I could tell just by looking at him that he would not ask for things I did not want to give. He was so comfortable and human, so used to the world, so at home with himself. He was content to live and let live. He had no axe to grind, no identity to assert. If he would have me, I knew with him I could just be myself.

As I got to know him better, I saw how it was he who held the Collegium together. Magdalena, the nominal leader, was tactless and sometimes abrasive, and had driven more than one musician away. It was Matthias who negotiated the compromises, soothed the ruffled feathers, smoothed over Silke's moodiness and Peter's forgetfulness, and generally calmed everyone down with a mixture of tolerance, serenity and good humour.

Sophie once asked me if I didn't miss being with someone younger, a man my own age. I didn't really understand the question. What did age have to do with it? I was always with Matthias, and I was happy with him.

On my third or fourth Sunday visit to the flat in August-Bebel-Strasse, Matthias was waiting in the hall when I arrived.

"I'm glad you've come," he said, and kissed my cheek. "I was hoping I would see you before I left."

"You're not going out?" I said.

"Yes, I'm afraid I have to. Werner called. He wants to see me about something rather urgent."

“Can't you even stay for tea?”

“No, I wish I could, but I have to go right away. Lili's expecting you. She's been looking forward to it.”

I could tell from the way he looked at me that he had too. But Werner needed him, so he couldn't stay. I remember thinking that I would have liked to have a friend who would drop everything when I needed him. After a childhood spent looking after my mother, what I wanted most of all was someone to look after me. When it became clear that Matthias was prepared to do just that, I felt a sense of relief such as I had never known. I was no longer alone. I belonged to Matthias now.

OLIVIER

Reading Anne's letters, I could see exactly why she was so smitten with Matthias and Lili. They offered her things she had never found before. Sophie and Anne had both had disastrous childhoods, though for different reasons, and they had both flown the nest as soon as they were able. Sophie had marched out, slamming the door, to me. Anne's retreat had been more gradual. For years she had taken refuge in her studies. Anne was a brilliant student. She had passed her baccalauréat with honours, then her degree in German, and then her master's. After that, she announced that she was planning a doctorate. First, however, she wanted to spend some time in Germany. Luise was not pleased, but could not reasonably oppose it, although she did insist that Anne should spend her year abroad in East rather than West Germany. And so Anne went off to Leipzig, out of Luise's orbit. When we started hearing about Matthias the cellist and his aunt Lili and their amazing time-warp apartment soon after she arrived, I realized she was doing the same thing as Sophie, though in a more inconspicuous way.

Luise Clement had met Julien Coste in May 1956 in a café in Montparnasse. They were both twenty-one. Julien was a student at the École des Beaux Arts, and Luise was doing a French course at the Sorbonne. For the next two months, they spent most of their time together. Long romantic walks round the city, hot afternoons under the chestnut trees, sleepless nights in Julien's chambre de bonne on the boulevard Saint Michel. Luise once showed me a photo from this period. It had been taken in front of

Notre Dame. They made a striking couple: Luise an ethereal Nordic beauty, Julien already very much the dandy.

The trouble was, it should have stopped right there. By mid-June, Luise was beginning to suspect that Julien, for all his charm, was less preoccupied with her tragic situation than he ought to have been, and Julien was beginning to glimpse a side of Luise that was, he said frankly, more than he wanted to deal with. (Luise liked to see herself as a victim of history. In her more dramatic moments, she was apt to proclaim that she had been born under a Dark Star.) But at the end of June, when she was preparing reluctantly to return to Schweinfurt, she discovered she was pregnant. In 1956, there were fewer solutions to her predicament than now, and the scandal of an unmarried mother in provincial Germany didn't bear thinking about. Julien was the most selfish person I had ever met, but he was also, paradoxically, a man of honour. I don't think it even crossed his mind to abandon her to her fate. He never said anything to me to suggest that he might have had doubts. They were married three months later, and moved south to Uzès. Julien cut short his studies to join his Uncle Benjamin in the antique shop, and Sophie was born the following March.

For Julien, this was not the blow it could have been. Losing a year at the Beaux Arts didn't bother him. He had always known that he was not an artist. He enjoyed looking at paintings, he once told me, but had never felt the urge to paint them himself. What he liked was the perfection of a finished work of art: the translucence of rare porcelain, the patina of old furniture, the hand-woven intricacy of a Persian rug. With a mother who was a painter, and a father who had collected porcelain, he had always lived among beautiful things. Spending his days in the antique shop, surrounded by rare and precious objects, suited him perfectly.

For Luise, it was another matter. I imagine she realized fairly soon that she had gone from one trap into another. When Sophie was born, she must have heard the gates clang shut behind her. Still, she did her best to survive. She decorated the apartment they bought in the centre of Uzès, she played at being the antique dealer's wife, she tried hard to become French, and she never spoke a word of German, not even to the baby. By all accounts, she didn't talk to the baby much at all. Sophie liked to claim that she had brought herself up, with the help of Joséphine. She was a solemn, self-reliant child, who sat in a corner with crayons and paper and drew.

By the time Anne came along, five years later, things had changed. Luise had come out of her trance, decided she was bored staying at home with Julien and his fine

china, and looked around for a career. In a small town like Uzès, options were limited. It rapidly became clear that one of the few occupations open to her was teaching German. Five years earlier, she would have rejected it out of hand. But by now, she was beginning to remember her roots with more composure. For one thing, her father had died, and that altered her feelings a lot. The Standartenführer committed suicide in 1960, two years before Anne was born. Luise didn't go to the funeral, but she resumed contact with her mother. They never met again, but they sent each other Christmas cards.

Energized by her loss, Luise finished her degree and found a job in the lycée in Avignon. She began travelling to Germany again, and got into the habit of visiting old schoolfriends every summer. When Anne was born, she spoke to her in German. Remembering no doubt her own privileged childhood in pre-war Germany, she taught Anne the songs she had learned as a child, and told her stories of her own childhood. One of Anne's earliest memories was sitting on her mother's lap learning to read from a German picture book. It was the story of Hansel and Gretel lost in the wood trying to find their way home.

MATTHIAS

The winter I met Anne was unusually cold, and we spent much of it indoors. We talked and we played music. Under the warmth of the duvet, we discussed our previous love affairs, swapped anecdotes from our childhood, exchanged world views, and gossiped about members of the Collegium. Occasionally we attempted duets with the violin and the cello: more often, we persuaded Lili to join us on my father's piano. Lili no longer sang, and she had barely touched the piano in recent years, but when Anne arrived she took to practising again. The austere, slightly gloomy atmosphere of our family apartment was transformed by Anne's presence. Part of it was her clothes. She liked bright colours: pink and red and yellow. But it wasn't just that: the air seemed somehow lighter. I got used to coming home in the evenings and finding Brel or Brassens on the record-player, and Lili and Anne deep in conversation at the kitchen table. They spent much of their time discussing recipes. Anne liked to cook. She did not have much practical sense: she was not good at carrying out household tasks, and hopeless at fulfilling administrative obligations, but she was an

instinctive natural cook. She made us gratins and ragoûts and soufflés and mousses, all conceived in defiance of the local food stores, which lacked olive oil, garlic, rosemary, thyme, and several other vital ingredients. In the beginning, everything was put before us with an apology. After a while, realizing that we lacked even the most elementary standards of comparison, she stopped apologising, though she still muttered crossly to herself as she stirred her saucepans.

In spring, when the weather started to improve, I took to borrowing Werner's car, and we made day trips to Erfurt and Weimar. After a winter spent mostly indoors, Anne was anxious to see new places, but for me the excursions were marred by the growing awareness that in a few months she would return to France, and I would never see her again. She didn't like the DDR, and I doubted she would come back. She was constantly irritated by the absence of amenities which she was used to taking for granted - phones and clothes and anchovies and pine nuts - and her irritation was compounded by the realization of her own inability to do without them. The DDR had taught her things about herself she would rather not have known. And of course, that wasn't all.

At Easter, she had spent a few days in Berlin, staying with a friend from university who had joined the diplomatic service. Every time she came out of the French Embassy, she had been stopped by Stasi plainclothes men, who introduced themselves as "Meister Meier. Ihr Ausweis, bitte." On three successive days, she had been stopped by three different agents, who all claimed to be called Meister Meier. They read the details of her passport into a tape recorder, and then let her go. When she got back to Leipzig, she was still shivering with fright and outrage.

She would hold out till the end of the school year, I thought bleakly, and then go home to Uzès and marry some nice boy her own age, have children like her sister, write her doctoral thesis on contrasting concepts of destiny in French and German literature, get a job in a university, and remember me vaguely as someone she had known during her year abroad. Bitterly I recalled my fantasies of marrying her on the night we met. How could I have imagined such a thing? What did I have to offer - life in prison? She was getting more and more resentful of the fact that the shops had nothing she wanted, and that the only French newspaper on sale was *L'Humanité*. She chafed increasingly against the obligation to record her name in the house book kept by the neighbour on the floor above every time she stayed overnight with me. Her sentence was nearly over, and she was ready to run for freedom.

My good humour drained away, though I tried not to let it show. I didn't want to spoil our last weeks together. I wanted her to have good memories to take home.

One Sunday in May, we went to Eisenach. We visited Bach's house in the town and Luther's castle just outside it. Wartburg Castle was where Luther had translated the Bible while he was in hiding from the Emperor, I told her, but she wasn't paying attention. She was tense and abstracted all day. I wondered if she was already imagining herself back in France. When we got into the car to drive home, she put out a hand to stop me turning on the engine, and announced that there was something she had to say. I looked at her inquiringly. She clutched her hands together in her lap. I suddenly realized she was nervous.

"I don't want to go back to France," she said. "I want to stay here with you."

I was touched by her fervour, all the more so as I had not been expecting it. "I only wish you could."

"If you want me to stay, I can stay."

"Do you mean the Institute will renew your contract?"

"That's not the point. I want us to get married."

Married? I gazed at her blankly. She spelled it out for me.

"I want to marry you, Matthias. I don't want to go back to France, I want to spend the rest of my life with you."

"Anne, you can't marry me!"

She looked alarmed. "Why not?"

"This country, that's why not! You know you can't stay here."

"Of course I can."

"You hate it here."

"It's true I don't like it very much," she admitted. "But I don't hate it."

"Yes you do. What about the hole in the wall? What about Meister Meier?"

"But I love you. With you it doesn't matter."

I was suddenly aware how young she was. "It will in the end," I said.

"Matthias, what's wrong?" Her voice began to tremble. "Don't you want to marry me?"

"Of course I do. There's nothing I want more. But you haven't thought about what it would mean for you."

"Yes I have. I've thought it through very carefully. It's perfectly simple. I can't go back to France and leave you here. So the only thing is for me to stay here too."

I looked at her wonderingly. "Would you really stay here with me?"

"Yes."

"For the rest of your life?"

"Yes."

"Writing people's names down in the house book?"

"The Hausbuch doesn't matter."

"What if your family comes?"

"Then I'll write down their names too."

"They'll get into trouble at Customs bringing you olive oil."

"They can bring me garlic too. See what Customs makes of that."

I shook my head. "I can't let you do it."

"Matthias- "

"Think about it, Anne. If we have children, they'd have to grow up here. I don't know if you understand what that means. We'd have to teach them what Lili taught me. How to say things they don't mean, how to hide their feelings, how to live a double life."

"If you and Lili did it, we can do it too."

I said nothing, but I could feel the smile beginning to creep across my face. "I can't believe you'd do this for me."

She was smiling too. "I know you can't, Matthi. That's why I want to do it."

The day we were married, Werner gave a party for us at his house in Gohlis. It was a warm midsummer evening. Werner and Christa had set candles all round the garden, creating a magical, other-worldly atmosphere. Anne had supplied the music, Christa had cooked vast amounts of food, and Werner had managed to get hold of some decent Hungarian wine. Anne's pre-wedding nerves had vanished, and even Silke, who had been particularly gloomy lately, had cheered up. All our friends were there. They sprawled under the trees, and clustered in the kitchen. Children played tag in the bushes, and practised cartwheels on the grass. The members of the Collegium mixed with Anne's colleagues from the Institute and mine from the University. A sprinkling of Lili's elderly friends looked on from the sidelines, and listened to Anne's French singers. *Non, rien de rien, non, je ne regrette rien.* Several ladies who had known me from the cradle informed me that they had quite despaired of me, and they were delighted to see me married at the ripe age of forty-two.

The evening was enchanted: I can think of no other word. For once no one sniped at each other, nobody quarrelled. Everyone was in a good mood. Groups formed and re-formed, conversation swelled, music mingled with laughter in the warm night air. Anne shone that evening: she glowed, she shimmered, she flooded the garden with light. She and I were rarely together. We circled from group to group, took part in different conversations, smiled into other faces. We barely exchanged a word. There was not one minute we were not aware of each other. *Mais, mon amour, mon doux, mon tendre, mon merveilleux amour.* Our eyes met over the candle flames, our hands touched as we moved past each other in the dark, our bodies swayed to the rhythm of the songs. I knew the words as well as she did after hearing them all winter in the flat. *Je t'aime encore, tu sais, je t'aime.* We would have all the time we wanted later. Right now it was enough to be together with friends around us, affection cocooning us, and the soft night air spinning its web around us.

In a week she would leave for France, to spend the rest of the summer with her sister. I was not dismayed by the prospect of a few weeks apart. That summer I had no fears.

OLIVIER

When Anne wrote from Germany in the spring of 1986 to ask if she could spend the summer at La Capitelle, Sophie and I were baffled. She and Anne had not lived under the same roof for years, but every time they saw each other, they had a row. The last one had been the day before Anne left for Leipzig. Something to do with a doll in a red-checked dress, an obscure episode from their childhood, the details of which they both seemed to recall as if it were yesterday. Since Anne had been in Germany, they had taken to writing to each other, but still... In the end, we realized that Anne had no choice. She had nowhere else to go. She was refusing outright to stay with her mother in Avignon, while her father, who had an elegant little flat in the centre of Uzès, had apparently not offered his hospitality.

Of course, it was impossible to refuse. We awaited her arrival with trepidation. It was true that I had once offered Anne a roof (though I had never told Sophie that), but now that I knew her better, I would not have renewed the invitation.

As it turned out, the visit went far better than anyone could have expected. Anne made sure of that as soon as she got here. For her first evening, we had invited

Julien and Luise to dinner. It was a warm summer evening. Everyone seemed glad to see Anne home again. A soft breeze chased across the terrace and round the Judas tree. Sophie had made lamb tajine. The reunion was going beautifully. And then Luise, halfway through the cheese course, inquired casually,

“By the way, Liebchen, when are you coming home?”

“Home?” said Anne, perfectly blank.

“Yes, darling, back to Avignon. You can’t stay with Sophie forever. I’ve had your room repainted, and it’s ready for you to move in.”

Anne glanced at her mother over the camembert. “I’m not coming back to Avignon, Mutti. I’m staying with Sophie till the end of the summer, and then I’m going back to Leipzig.”

Luise put down her knife. “Back to Leipzig? Do you mean you’ve decided to stay another year.”

“No,” said Anne, as calmly as if she were discussing the price of the cheese, “I’m staying permanently. Matthias and I got married last week.”

There was a dead silence. For a moment, they all sat and blinked at each other. She had hinted at nothing, and no one had seen it coming. And then they all began to talk at once.

“Married!” said Luise.

“Matthias!” said Sophie.

“How very odd,” said Julien.

“But he’s East German!” said Sophie.

“But he’s old enough to be your father!” said Luise.

“Not quite,” said Julien.

“Do you mean you’re going to *stay* there?” said Sophie.

“But what about *me*?” said Luise.

“You survived when I got married,” said Sophie.

“Sophie, don’t be ridiculous!” said Luise.

“I’m sorry, Mutti,” said Anne.

“I fail to see what *you* have to do with this, Luise,” said Julien. “The important thing is Anne’s happiness.”

“I’m going to be very happy, Papa. And of course I’ll still come back and see you.”

“I certainly hope so. But what if they don’t let you out?”

"Oh they will," said Anne. "There won't be a problem there."

"How can you be sure?" said Julien.

"The officials I dealt with gave me guarantees."

"Can you trust them?"

"Yes, I'm sure I can."

She sounded so confident that no one challenged her.

"Still," said Julien, "you should have consulted us first."

"I considered it," said Anne, meeting his eyes.

"Well, if you know what you're doing," said Julien.

"Is that *all* you're going to say?" said Luise. "Well, of course it is! Never get involved in anything, that's your motto! If you'd paid her more attention when she was small, she wouldn't be looking for a substitute father now!"

Julien pushed back his chair from the table and folded his arms.

Sophie rolled her eyes.

I waited with interest to see what would happen next.

"Matthias is not my father," said Anne in a cool, clear voice.

"Liebchen, of course not," said Luise, "but even so, you must see that you can't go through with this. Right now, you're upset, you've just got here, but take a few days to think about it, and then you'll see that the best thing is to just write him a letter and say that you aren't going back. I'm sure he'll understand."

"For God's sake, Maman!" said Sophie.

Luise turned on her.

"And it wouldn't surprise me to learn that *you* have something to do with this! Why has she been writing letters to you all year when I've hardly heard from her?"

"That's something you should think about," said Sophie. "I'll fetch the dessert."

The furore lasted a week. After that, Luise gave up and retreated to Avignon, Anne apologized to Sophie and me for putting us in an awkward situation, Sophie asked if she was sure she knew what she was doing, Anne said she was, and there the matter rested.

During the rest of the summer, Sophie and Anne got on far better than anyone had anticipated. Anne seemed thankful to be back on home ground for a while. Sophie was relieved to see her safe and sound. The two of them spent hours shopping for what Anne called her trousseau: shirts and socks for Matthias, face creams and medicines for Lili, sweaters and kitchen knives for her. The rest of the time they spent

lying in the garden reminiscing about their self-absorbed parents and their dysfunctional childhood. "Do you remember the time he went to Paris for an auction on her birthday?" "Do you remember when she told the butcher she had been born under a Dark Star?" Once they laughed so long and so hysterically that they woke up six-month-old Martin and made him cry.

After that, Anne's yearly visits became an accepted thing. Sophie came to look forward to them. I was less enthusiastic. Anne's presence in the house made me mildly ill at ease. I knew I was being unfair, but I couldn't help it. Outwardly, Anne was enchanting. She was the perfect guest. She talked, she played with the children, she did the washing up. There was a lightness and radiance about her that made you feel privileged to have her there. But during all those family meals and excursions and discussions, you could never tell if what she said was what she really thought. Anne was like the sun: she dazzled you. She made it impossible for you to look her in the face. She used her brightness as a camouflage.

Given the way she had grown up, it was understandable. Her mother's notion of family life was to create factions, recruit allies, ensure loyalties. When I married Sophie, I was fascinated to see how each member of the family had developed resistance tactics to protect themselves from Luise. Julien relied on distance, and Sophie on hostility. That much was instantly clear. It took me longer to understand how Anne operated. Anne always seemed so bright and so transparent, so limpid, so anxious to please. In the end, after running into her in the street once or twice when she was supposed to be elsewhere, and catching her out a few times in contradictions, I realized that Anne, the favoured child, co-opted by Luise from the cradle, had developed the art of deception. Trapped in a quagmire of demands and obligations and expectations, reminded constantly that she was all Luise had, Anne had gone underground. As a child, she had learned the habit of trying to please and, if she could, she would do what people wanted, but if she couldn't, why, then she would deceive them. Sophie used to say that Anne was unpredictable, but it was more than that. Anne liked to lay false trails. If she told you she was going to Avignon, she was likely to be heading for Nîmes. If she told you her favourite composer was Brahms, it would probably turn out to be Bach. Once or twice, I tried to talk to her about it, but she brushed me off. Anne, behind her screen of light, would have made an excellent spy.

I had always assumed she exercised her equivocal talents only in Uzès, but seeing Matthias staring miserably into his glass on his first evening at La Capitelle, I

realized I was wrong. Was it another man, or was it something else? I would have liked to discuss it with Sophie, but her reaction when I broached the subject made me decide to back off. She and I had avoided talking about Anne for years. Sophie's adult relationship with Anne had been grounded in a peculiar mixture of guilt and resentment. Even though she grew to enjoy Anne's visits, even though they managed to develop a degree of intimacy that had not existed when they were young, the emotions of childhood had never entirely died. Because of this built-in ambivalence, Sophie was swift to defend her sister, and slow to acknowledge her defects. I had learned to keep my reservations about Anne to myself, and Sophie, if she had any, did the same.

I was hesitant to talk to Matthias too. I could see he needed help, but I wasn't sure how to offer it. How much did he really know about his wife? Matthias was a large man, heavily built and awkward. I couldn't understand what Anne had seen in him - until he touched his cello. The cello was a beautiful instrument, over one hundred years old, with a wonderful resonant sound, and, when he played it, Matthias was transformed. Like Anne, he was flooded with light. He leaned in to the shape of the cello, he bent protectively around it, he cajoled it, he tempted it. He forgot his own ungainliness. The world went away. Nothing existed but the feel of the instrument and the sound of the music. At such times, I think, he even forgot his own unhappiness.

MATTHIAS

The cello was the only thing that kept me sane. It saved me after Anne died, and it saved me again after I saw the file. I stayed in the music room for hours on end, and played the Cello Suites. I submerged myself entirely in their complex, stylized universe. I advanced from note to note in a steady unfaltering progression. At times I reached some kind of inner peace. That enclosed, stable, intricate world was the only place I felt safe. The rules were known, and everything was laid down in advance. Nothing would intrude, nothing would change. On the surface, things might seem to evolve: a fugue might lead to a counter-fugue, and a double fugue to a triple fugue, but in the end, everything would come back to its starting-point. Everything flowed, but at

the same time, everything stood still. When I played Bach, it was the only time I knew where I was.

The Kantor had had certainties that I did not, and for that I envied him. In the ordered world of eighteenth-century society, Johann Sebastian Bach was an artisan exercising his skills in the service of God and his prince. Unlike the Romantic composers, the anguish of creation was unknown to him. He knew neither states of mind nor states of soul. He got up in the morning, played the organ, rehearsed the choir, composed cantatas. He knew what society expected of him. He understood his place in the world. Nothing could disrupt his life: not even death. When his wife died, he remarried. When his children died, he got over it. In Bach's day, people believed in Harmony and Reason. Since then, things have changed.

I was born in an empire that no longer exists, and I spent most of my life in a country that voted to erase itself from the map after forty years of existence. I can't say I regret either of them. The Third Reich was a criminal regime, and the German Democratic Republic was a mean-spirited little state with not much on its mind beyond Order and Anti-Fascism. Tante Lili made sure I saw through it from the start.

My parents had been killed in one of the last bombing raids on Leipzig, and it was Lili who brought me up, dispensed what she considered an appropriate political education, and trained me in survival techniques. According to Lili, the leaders of the DDR were all fools and idiots, starting with the Cobbler's Son himself, General Secretary Ulbricht, with his pointed beard and affected Leninist airs. (Lili had grown up at a time when cobblers knew their place.) During the Nazi period, a lot of German communists had taken refuge in Moscow. There, Lili assured me, Stalin had sifted through the new arrivals with a fine-tooth comb, purged anyone who had half a brain, and made sure that the only people available to return to Berlin at the end of the war were dyed-in-the-wool apparatchiks with no ideas of their own. "Nur die dummen Leute," she insisted. Only the stupid ones. I grew up knowing that the things I heard at home should not be repeated outside the house.

Lili had been a communist sympathizer for most of the Hitler period, but her revolutionary enthusiasm had wilted fast in the turgid atmosphere of the new Democratic Republic. She had hoped for a genuine German socialist state, but it soon became clear that the Cobbler's Son had other ideas. Not long after his arrival, the Communist Party swallowed up the Socialist Party by force, and pointedly rechristened itself the Socialist Unity Party. Friends of Lili's who had spent years in

Nazi prisons were shunted aside in favour of those who had spent the war years in the Soviet Union.

From the start, the DDR was Moscow's country. Walter Ulbricht, the first General Secretary, flew in from the USSR at the end of the war, and Erich Honecker, the last one, returned there when Germany reunified. In the forty years of their sojourn in Germany, the men from Moscow never garnered more than lukewarm support. They had hoped to mobilize the masses, but they had chosen a bad time. After nearly two decades of Nazism and war, all people wanted was a quiet life, and a spot of material comfort. In the first twelve years of the DDR's existence, one-sixth of its citizens decided their chances of both were better in the West. By the middle of 1961, two thousand people a day were leaving the DDR.

Faced with the prospect of a country with no people in it, the Cobbler's Son resolved on desperate measures. In the night of August 13, 1961, a barbed wire cordon went up along the border between East and West Berlin. Traffic was halted. S-Bahn and U-Bahn links between the two halves of the city were cut. Phone links were severed. People who had been spending Saturday night with friends or relations on the other side of the city found themselves stranded. Silke, the viola-player from the Collegium, was separated from her parents, and didn't see them again for fifteen years. Old ladies jumped out of windows, soldiers leapt over barbed wire. Within a few weeks, it was too late even for that. The barbed wire fence was replaced by a concrete wall four meters high. The wall, it was explained, was an Anti-Fascist Protection Barrier. The frontier guards shot to kill.

With the Fascists safely banished to the far side of the Wall, the regime was free to concentrate on its second objective: Order. It was then that the Stasi began to come into its own. It was then that they began to stifle us. They turned us into a country of informers, a republic of files. They watched us, followed us, spied on us. They searched our apartments, opened our letters, listened to our phone calls. They made us understand that we were helpless. Informers reported on our activities, and informers informed on the informers. The IMs, as we called them, were everywhere. You never knew who might be working for the Stasi: your neighbour, your postman, your best friend. Cut off behind our wall, we trusted no one. From time to time we sang of freedom, but we had forgotten how to fly.

3. TEA WITH THE MINISTRY

SOPHIE

Towards the end of the week, my father called to say that he was back from Paris. If I wanted, he said, I could take Matthias to the shop the following day. Matthias brightened up at the prospect of finally meeting one of his wife's parents. I smiled at him, and said nothing. When Olivier came home that night, I told him what had happened.

"You never know," said Olivier, yawning, "they may hit it off."

He dropped his jeans on the floor and yawned again. He had just got in from his evening with his teenage protégés, and we were on our way to bed.

"Only if Matthias decides to buy one of his armoires. Or a fifth-century Chinese vase to take home."

"Don't be so cynical, darling." Olivier pulled back the duvet and got into bed.

"I'm just being realistic," I said, unbuttoning my shirt. "My father prefers objects to people, we all know that."

"Sophie, you're not being fair."

"Do you know what my father considers a day well spent?"

"No," said Olivier. "Are you coming to bed?"

"A day well spent is one when he manages to pass on one of his treasures to a discriminating customer, thereby spreading a little beauty in an increasingly ugly world."

"When did he say that?"

"Last time he came to dinner. Weren't you listening?"

But it was late, Olivier had no desire to talk about my father and, besides, he had other things in mind. So he just smiled at me, and patted the sheet beside him. I didn't protest. I knew I had made my point.

*

My father's shop was right in the centre of Uzès. When he had taken over the business from his Uncle Benjamin some years earlier, it had been located in a vast sprawling building on the outskirts of town, more of a warehouse than a shop really, with cobwebby furniture and unidentifiable objects stacked high in every corner. On rainy

days, Anne and I would clamour to go there to play hide and seek. But in recent years, the antiques trade had prospered, wealthy Swiss businessmen had restored and furnished every abandoned farmhouse in sight, and my father had sold the warehouse, got rid of Benjamin's junk, and moved into smaller but more prestigious premises between the ducal palace and the central square.

From here, he acted as arbiter of taste to the country homes of the region. The Swiss wives adored him, and the trendy Parisian professionals, who came down to Uzès to play house in the garrigue, were convinced he was providing them with bargains they would never find elsewhere. Relationships with his customers were the kind that my father liked best. They were perfectly suited to his peculiar mixture of charm and distance, and of course they revolved around the only thing that really interested him. My father saw no point in worrying about politics or social misery or emotional problems, including his own. He considered that there was nothing to be done about such things, and that, in any case, they usually went away again in the end.

When he married my mother, I think he did his best to make her happy, but he discovered fairly soon that he was incapable of understanding either my mother herself, or her complex and unresolved feelings towards her family history. It wasn't, he once told me, that he didn't sympathize. Obviously it wasn't easy to come to terms with the fact that one's father had been an SS officer. For a while, he tried to look after her, as she clearly expected him to do, but after a year or two he concluded that her enduring bitterness and self-pity were too much to cope with. Naturally, he never said so. He merely stopped listening. Confrontation was something my father instinctively avoided. He had developed the art of ignoring unpleasantness, blocking things out, watching how the light fell on a polished surface, noting the exquisite paintwork on a piece of china, letting everything else wash over him.

My father's philosophical model was Renaissance man, tempered by classical hedonism and twentieth-century consumerism. When Anne and I were young, he took us to Florence and Rome. Although the inspiration for the trips was purely selfish, the motive turned out not to matter. My father was so enthralled by what he saw, he knew so much about it, and he explained it so well, that he had no difficulty getting us to share his enthusiasm. Those trips were among my best childhood memories.

My father believed that the reason you were on earth was to develop your individuality and realize your potential to the full. To do this, you required suitable instruments: the Uffizi and the Coliseum, seventeenth-century farmhouse tables, and

your very own personal blend of tea. Once I was in the shop when he managed to convince a client that the oak sideboard he was trying to sell her would not just complete her house, but enhance her personality. In recent years, he had got interested in zen and feng shui, and spent a lot of time re-positioning his furniture. Though not a generous man, he was capable of giving people he hardly knew a book or object that he believed was exactly right for them. He could not bear the thought that without this one thing their lives would fall short of perfection. One summer he gave Anne a rare nineteenth-century work on the Huguenots to take back to Matthias in Leipzig. Even my mother occasionally received embroidered antique cushions or books on flower arranging, though in her case they arrived through the post. Since the divorce, my father did his utmost to avoid encountering her in person, and he was generally successful. I had never met anyone with as much talent as my father for avoiding things he didn't want to do.

JULIEN

I had no desire at all to meet Anne's husband, but I could see that I was not going to be able to avoid it.

Why this man should wish to come to France to make the acquaintance of people with whom he no longer had any connection, I *could* not fathom, but if he wished to undergo what would undoubtedly be a trying experience, it was *entirely* his affair. Quite probably he was one of those people who felt themselves obliged to make their lives as unpleasant as possible. Like my wife. Maybe all Germans were like that. Anne had certainly got herself into a very odd situation when she went to Germany. I sincerely hoped Matthias wasn't planning to bring *that* business up. Was it possible he might have found out about it? I remembered reading somewhere that East German citizens could now see the files that had been kept on them. Not a good idea, in my opinion. Life is disagreeable enough already: why make it worse?

Anyway, I had absolutely *no* intention of getting involved in a discussion of secret police files. *Far* too baroque for me. That was why I had told Sophie to bring Matthias to the shop. At this time of year, it was generally quite full. Business was picking up again after the winter. My customers were flocking southward, airing out

their houses, discovering new needs. I was relying on their presence in the shop to prevent the conversation getting out of hand.

MATTHIAS

Julien's shop was not the kind of place I would normally frequent. It had a sober dark-green frontage, and a single very old oak chest in the window. It was the kind of establishment which expected its clients to have certain qualities I was unable to provide. West Germans were coming to Leipzig and opening shops like this for other West Germans.

"*So nice to meet you,*" said Julien, shaking my hand. "*So good of you to come all this way to see us.*"

He wore a black velvet jacket over a white T-shirt, and he lounged behind a polished oak desk. He had a dramatic head of white hair, perfectly manicured finger nails, and a racy little white beard. My first reaction was amazement. I could not imagine how this elegant personage could possibly be Anne's father. Or Sophie's, come to that. Sophie favoured an ethnic look that tended towards long skirts and embroidered waistcoats, while Anne's clothes had been fashionable but not elegant.

I started to say something about Anne, and how much I regretted- He cut me off at once.

"*I do hope you're enjoying your visit. There's a lot to see in Uzès. You must go to the Pont du Gard while you're in the area.*"

"I heard so much from Anne-"

"Avignon and Nîmes are charming cities. Both founded by the Romans, of course."

"It's such a pity we weren't able to meet-"

"And Alès, if you're interested in the Camisards."

I gave up the effort. He went on talking. He told me where to go for Roman ruins, and where to seek out Protestant history. I listened, baffled. Granted, the similarity in our ages would have made our relationship awkward even when Anne was alive, but was he simply going to ignore it now she was dead?

"Have you visited the cathedral yet? Oh, then you really should. There are two *rather* interesting paintings by Simon de Chalons. Sixteenth-century. He was a reputed Provençal master, you know. Isn't that so, Sophie?"

Sophie had been wandering round the shop, occasionally picking something up to examine it. "Yes," she said, putting down a porcelain jug. "Of course he was." She looked from one to the other of us, and decided that the conversation had gone far enough. "Did you say you had a customer with a picture that needs restoring?"

Julien seized on the change of subject with obvious relief. "Yes, she does indeed. I'll tell her to call you, shall I? Have you been to Avignon yet?"

"We're going on Monday," said Sophie, and Julien frowned.

"That *might* not be a good idea. I believe the Palais des Papes is closed on Mondays. Or is it Tuesdays?"

"Papa, I'm taking Matthias to Avignon to meet Maman. She has a free afternoon."

"Oh, well, in *that* case," said Julien.

Two expensively-clad ladies who had been examining an armoire for the past ten minutes were beginning to look inquiringly in his direction. He threw them an apologetic smile and got to his feet.

"How long are you staying, Matthias?"

"I'm not quite sure. A few more days I think."

"*Do* come and see me again before you go." He paused for a moment, eyeing me thoughtfully, and sighed. "Oh yes, oh dear, you really should come back. Come back when you've seen Luise. Sophie can mind the shop for half an hour and I'll take you to see the street where the wool-carders lived."

"Thank you," I said. "That would be very nice."

I had already seen the street where the wool-carders lived. Rue Grande Bourgade was a narrow street of closed doors and shuttered windows. It stood just outside the boundaries of the old walled city, but it was as enclosed and secretive as all the rest. Jacques had written the street name in the Bible, but he had not indicated the house. I had no idea which of these low faceless buildings he had lived in. I did not know behind which of these blank facades he might have pursued his trade, read his Bible, planned his departure. All I knew about Jacques was his name and his itinerary: Uzès, Geneva, Magdeburg. I had no idea who he was, what he looked like, what kind of person he had been. I had walked the length of the street, hoping vaguely for clues,

but with no success. I came out into a small square. There was no one around. Old houses looked down over a fountain in the shape of a swan, and a dilapidated Evangelical Centre with rusting shutters stood at one corner of the square.

The wool-carders were long gone, and so was Jacques. It was unlikely that Julien Coste could help me find him. I smiled politely and agreed to return next week, but I knew already I would not go back. He had rebuffed me once: why let him do it again? I would stay over the weekend, I decided, visit Luise, and then go home. I was wasting my time in Uzès. These people had forgotten Anne ever existed: they had pushed her right out of their lives. It was folly to hope that they might have room for me.

SOPHIE

My father's behaviour had been worse than I expected, and I felt I had to make amends. Breaking with my usual lunchtime routine of a sandwich, or the previous night's leftovers, eaten standing up in front of a picture, I set lunch for two on the terrace. Fougasse from the boulangerie, tomato salad, and the remains of a bottle of red wine. I could see that Matthias was hurt and bewildered by my father's failure to acknowledge him. The meeting with my mother would be even worse. I felt the need to spend time talking to him, being nice to him, and generally compensating for my frightful family.

"I'm sorry about my father," I said, pouring the wine. "I should have warned you he wouldn't talk about Anne. He never discusses anything unpleasant."

"Did he disapprove of our marriage?"

"That's too strong a word. He had doubts about it, naturally, we all did. That was inevitable," I added, as Matthias looked up. "Put yourself in our place. You lived in a communist country, you were older than she was...."

Matthias speared a tomato and said nothing. I wondered what Anne had told him about our reactions to her marriage. Disapproval was not in my father's emotional repertoire, but he had definitely been perplexed. He could not understand, he had told Olivier, how people got themselves into such odd situations. My mother had made up for his half-heartedness: she had, of course, been outraged. The first week of Anne's visit had been one long series of rows and recriminations. She had driven over every

day from Avignon to accuse Anne of abandoning her. My father had been charged with responsibility for the crime, and I had been charged with collusion and complicity. Anne bore it all with remarkable serenity. She sat through my mother's tirades with a secret smile that my father and I found reassuring. She never flinched. She was so plainly somewhere else that my mother ran out of steam. In the end, with nothing more to say, she retired discomfited to Avignon.

But I was not going to explain all this to Matthias now. "My father has nothing against you, if that's what you're thinking. If he did, he wouldn't have offered to show you the wool-carders' district."

"Why does he want me to see your mother first?"

"I don't know. Is that a problem? When do you have to be back in Leipzig?"

Matthias poked at his fougasse. After a moment, he said, "I don't work at the university any more. At the moment, I don't have a job. I've been giving private lessons: French and music. I can't teach history in Germany any more."

I blinked. "Why not?"

"After the Change, everyone lost their job and had to reapply for a teaching position. You need a certificate to say you're above suspicion. Whiter than white. The same as after the Nazi times. We call it a Persilschein. If you don't have it, you can't teach in a university."

"But what do you have to do to get it?"

"Nothing. They look in your file, that's all. They see who you were and what you did."

"If you were a Party member, you mean?"

"That doesn't necessarily count against you. It's understood that once you reached a certain level, you would have had to join the Party or risk losing your job."

"What then?"

"One problem is if you worked for the Stasi. If you were an Inoffizieller Mitarbeiter, an unofficial collaborator, and informed on your colleagues, you have no chance of getting your job back. People won't stand for it."

"I can see that's understandable."

"If your subject was physics or maths, you have a much better chance of getting a job than someone who taught the humanities. Teachers of history or economics have practically no chance of getting a certificate, since what we taught inevitably reflected Marxist-Leninist dogma to some extent."

"Is that what happened to you?"

"The process is less clear-cut than I'm making it sound. There are a lot of grey areas. Some people have been denounced by their colleagues because of personal feuds, and some dubious cases survive scrutiny because a person who was harrassed by the regime testifies in their favour. A professor in my department accused himself of cooperating with the Stasi during a trip to Algeria. What that means is that he informed on the other members of the group. But no evidence of this was found in his files, and they took him back after six months."

"Even though he was a history teacher?"

"Yes. I think he knew that the files would turn out to be empty."

"But why bother to accuse himself in that case?"

"I don't know. I never understood. There was a lot about his case that wasn't clear. Some of our colleagues testified that he had always behaved correctly and never caused harm to anyone. That kind of thing usually helps."

"Can't you find someone to testify in your favour too?"

"I don't think that would be possible. They published lists of names in the Leipzig local paper, and of course everyone who saw them would remember."

He looked at me, but I was lost.

"Lists of informers, I mean." A long pause. "You see I worked for them too. I was an IM for the Stasi."

I was so startled that I dropped my fork. "You? It's not possible!"

Matthias bent to retrieve the fork. He handed it back to me with a rueful smile. "They forced me into it. I had no choice. I had to do what they wanted, or else they would have stopped us marrying and sent Anne back to France."

"You mean they blackmailed you?"

"It happened to a lot of people."

"What did they want you to do?"

"I have a friend whose name is Werner. I've known him all my life. He's a medical researcher. We grew up in the same neighbourhood, we went to school together. What drew us together was that we were both outsiders, me because of the things Tante Lili told me, and Werner because his father was a pastor. We were Other-Thinkers, Andersdenkende. What we were taught at home was not the official line, and that made us both permanently sceptical of the regime. But he and I reacted to this in very different ways. My solution was to withdraw from it, and concentrate

on music, but Werner was always more confrontational. Around 1985, he got interested in the environment. Leipzig was a focus of environmental activity because there were open lignite mines close to the city, and this made it one of the most polluted areas of the DDR. We also had the worst urban decay of any East German city. It was never rebuilt after the war, and there was bomb damage all over the place. Fine old buildings had been allowed to fall into ruin, yet at the same time there was a terrible housing shortage."

"And that's why they wanted you to inform on Werner?"

"Yes, because if you criticized the state of the environment, you were criticizing the regime."

"But if they'd taken measures to protect the environment, they would have defused the criticism."

"I doubt they were capable of that kind of thinking. In any case, there was no money."

"Because they used the money to pay informers?"

"I never took any money from them," said Matthias sharply. "I always refused it."

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean- "

"But it didn't start with the environment. The first time they called me in to talk about Werner was in 1983. That was when he was active with the Peace Movement, trying to remove foreign missiles from German soil. Back then, I was able to stall them. But three years later, when I requested permission to marry a foreigner, they had me where they wanted me. I couldn't refuse."

"So you agreed to inform on your friend?" Matthias winced. I wished I hadn't sounded quite so incredulous.

"Yes."

"But how did they...? How did you...?" I fumbled around, groping for words. "Did they threaten you? Did they put you in prison?"

"Good heavens, no. We had a perfectly civilized conversation. They offered me tea. It was like that in the DDR."

MATTHIAS

I remembered my discussions with the men from the Ministry for State Security quite well. Partly because it's not easy to forget that kind of thing, and partly because I had read the transcript of the conversations just a couple of weeks before. It was the first thing I saw when I opened my file.

I had asked to see my Stasi file as soon as the archives were opened, but there was a delay of several months before I received a letter from the Gauck Authority summoning me to see it. The Gauck Authority was the government agency responsible for overseeing the old East German secret police archives. Its offices were located in the building which had once housed the Stasi itself. It was called the Haus am Runden Eck. The House on the Round Corner. The aura of repression was still so strong that it felt strange to walk inside and state my business.

I had been told to ask for a woman named Fräulein Schroeder, who was the official responsible for my file. Fräulein Schroeder was younger than me, with a round reassuring face and a homely smile. Her job was to read through each file before the owner saw it and delete any references to innocent third parties. We had a short talk, and she warned me what to expect. Then she took me into the reading room to see my file.

The reading room was a large light room furnished with formica tables and orange chairs. They had tried to make it as pleasant as possible. There were plants on the windowsill, and paintings on the walls. In the middle of the room was a table for the supervisor, who was there to answer questions on terminology, and ensure that no papers were stolen. The only thing on her desk was a large box of Kleenex. Seeing your file can be a shock, Fräulein Schröder had told me. Sometimes you find you have to go back into your soul and consider the whole of your life in a different light.

She settled me at a table with a stack of folders. At the top of each one were my name and number. *Girardet, Matthias. XIII 141/83*. Below it came the date the file was opened: 16 May 1983. Next came the archive number, the volume number, and a stamp that said LEIPZIG. My file ran to seven volumes. It was more than I had expected. The date was also a shock. I hadn't realized that there had been a file on me as long ago as that. I had been in their sights for longer than I thought.

The file was in two parts. The first part covered the information I had provided to the Stasi myself, in my capacity as an Inoffizieller Mitarbeiter, reporting on Werner.

The second part contained the reports that other IMs had made on me. That was the reason I had applied to see my file. I wanted to see who had reported on me, and what they had said. Still, I decided to take a look at my own reports first. They would be no less unsavoury, but they would at least have the advantage of familiarity.

The section began with transcripts of my two official interviews with the Stasi, one in 1983 and one in 1986. The flavour of the conversations came back to me at once, along with the bland grey faces of the men I had talked to, Becker and Lutz, the same two men both times, courteously plying me with tea and intimidation in a dingy little office on the fourth floor of the University.

Becker: Herr Professor, thank you for agreeing to meet us. My name is Becker, and this is my colleague Lutz. Can we offer you some tea?

Lutz: We're from the Ministry for State Security. I expect you've been told you what this is about. No? Well, never mind. Basically, we requested this discussion in order to clear up a couple of points. Would you like to smoke, by the way?

Becker: Then let's get straight to the point. We are here to talk about Dr. Werner Müller. You have known Dr. Müller for a long time, isn't that correct? I think we might say he's a good friend of yours.

Lutz: Recently Dr. Müller has begun to take an interest in the peace movement, we believe he may have had contacts with foreign embassies, and we look on this with some concern. This is the reason for our conversation here today.

The first time, it hadn't been too difficult to find excuses. I had known Werner for over thirty years, I told them. His family had fled to Leipzig from Breslau at the end of the war, and they had settled in the same street as us. Werner was a few years older than me, but we had become friends, and we had remained friends ever since. If he had contacts with foreign embassies, I was not aware of them. I didn't share Werner's political interests, and there was no reason for him to confide such information to me.

We usually met alone, or with members of our families. His wife was often present, and my Aunt Lili sometimes joined us.

At the mention of Lili, the atmosphere became slightly more threatening. The younger one began to thumb through his papers.

Lutz: I take it you are referring to Fräulein Girardet, Caroline, born 1911, currently residing August-Bebel-Strasse, Leipzig. I believe you and Frau Girardet in fact live in the same flat.

Girardet: Yes.

Lutz: Just the two of you?

Girardet: Yes, that's correct.

Lutz: The apartments in that part of town are generally a good size.

Girardet: Yes.

Lutz: No one else has ever lived there with you?

Girardet: For a while, yes, a young man who worked at the Gewandhaus occupied one of the rooms in our flat. But he requested a transfer to Dresden, and when he left, he was not replaced.

Becker: So since then, you have had the flat entirely to yourselves?

The flat was the first threat. The second was some West German I vaguely remembered meeting at Werner's house one evening, and who, according to Becker and Lutz, was really a member of the Permanent Representation of the Federal Republic in Berlin. I had got myself into a dangerous situation, they gloatingly announced, with this West German so-called diplomat, who had travelled round the DDR making contacts with undesirables of all stripes - punks in Dresden, dissidents in Jena, intellectuals in Leipzig - instead of fostering economic links as he was supposed

to do. What concerned them, said Lutz, was that Dr. Müller's intimate knowledge of the Leipzig social and intellectual scene might have made him a target for Western intelligence services. They didn't doubt Dr. Müller's loyalty, but they were afraid that, through ignorance, he might allow himself to be led astray and exploited by enemies of our country.

At this point, Becker, the senior man, took over. It was time to inject a little ideology into the conversation. The aim of our enemies, he explained, was to destroy us from within. They worked under cover of the church to manipulate our intellectuals. They claimed that it wasn't just the USA who were the aggressors, it was both super-powers. They believed that we had to resist both the USA and the USSR. We had to disarm entirely, we had to get rid of all the missiles on German soil. In Becker's view, this was very dangerous thinking. Even people like Dr. Müller, who were not subjectively ill-intentioned, could be influenced with these plausible arguments. As an old and trusted friend of Dr. Müller, he was sure that I didn't want this to happen. And therefore he had a proposal to make. His proposal was that I should attempt to determine whether Dr. Müller was still in contact with any person from the Permanent Representation, and what his intentions were with regard to further contacts with the West.

Re-reading the transcript after all those years, I could still remember the sweat starting on my forehead and the ice pricking at my spine. I could still see myself sitting on the hard metal chair, and I could still hear the cool, thoughtful tone of my response.

Girardet: Should I tell him openly that you have been in contact with me and that you are concerned about his welfare?

Becker: No, absolutely not. That would not be in our interests.

Girardet: Then I foresee a problem, which is that Werner and I never discuss politics. We have in fact an informal agreement never to do so. We talk about our personal lives, our families, occasionally the private lives of mutual acquaintances, or else we discuss cultural and historical topics. I am a historian, and Werner has always been deeply interested in German history. I am aware of his interest in the peace movement, but I have never

discussed it with him. If I were to bring up the subject of disarmament or West German contacts during one of our conversations, he would immediately guess the reason for it. My only chance of obtaining this information is to lay my cards on the table and tell him that the Ministry for State Security wants to know such and such.

How I had managed to produce an answer like that, I didn't know. Reading the transcript, I was momentarily awed by the daring of my younger self. It must have been the unnatural civility of the whole encounter which had led me to believe that I could get away with it. They didn't care for my response at all, Becker and Lutz, but on that particular day they were playing at being reasonable people, and so they had no choice but to accept it as a reasonable argument. "Yes," said Becker, thoughtfully, "I see the problem." We would adjourn the discussion, he decided, and meet again in ten days time, when everyone had had time to consider a possible solution. I spent an unpleasant few weeks waiting for them to return without the tea and with different operating methods, but the second meeting never took place.

It was several years before I found out that they had merely put me on hold. In 1983, they could do without me, but three years later, when Werner switched his attention to the environment and founded a working group to study environmental problems, a second conversation was held in the same room. This time no mention was made of Lili, nor of the flat, nor of dangerous West Germans. They didn't even offer to sabotage my career and have me kicked out of the University. There was no need. They simply delivered their ultimatum and sat back and waited for me to agree to it.

*

"I had no choice. Two weeks earlier I'd filled out a form requesting permission to marry a foreigner. The Antrag was sitting on the table right in front of them. I had to say yes."

Sophie was out of her depth. "But what did you...? How....? What kind of information did you give them?"

"None," I said. "It was out of the question for me to report on Werner. My solution was to drift apart from him. The less I saw him, the less I would have to tell. I didn't dare warn him openly, partly because I was scared they might find out - I knew

they would have other people reporting on him, and probably people reporting on me too - and partly because I knew he would despise me for giving in to them. Werner sees everything in terms of black and white. He doesn't recognize shades of grey. I once asked him if he was ever afraid, because of what he was doing, and his answer was no, because he had never felt that it was wrong. So I started to avoid him. I had plenty of excuses. Anne and I had just got married, I was busy with work, I was busy with the Collegium. And he, in any case, was spending more and more time on his environmental activities."

"What about the Stasi? Didn't they suspect anything?"

"Of course they did. They tried to force me to join Werner's environmental group, but I told them I didn't have time."

"Recruiting people to inform on their friends - I can't believe it!"

"That's nothing." I paused a moment. "They had people informing on their families too. Husbands spying on wives, parents spying on children."

"But why? What was the point?"

"They were scared of us. They knew the population didn't support them. So they tried to undermine us. They tried to reduce us to a state where we would be incapable of opposing them."

*

What frightened them was the workers' uprising in Berlin. In June 1953, a group of construction workers walked off a housing project in the centre of Berlin and marched on the House of Ministers. Within hours, the revolt had spread to the rest of the country. In Leipzig, several Party officials were attacked, and one got thrown out of a window. Lili said it served him right. Of course the Aufstand didn't last long. There were Soviet troops stationed all over the country, and it was put down the next day. Over one thousand people were killed. Still, the uprising shook the regime to its roots. It made it clear that the workers, in whose name they claimed to act, did not support them. Neither did a large part of the rest of the population. From then on, their main concern became to protect themselves against their own people. This task was entrusted to the Ministry for State Security, otherwise known as the Stasi.

The DDR was not, on the whole, a violent regime, and the Stasi never had the reputation for terror that characterized the KGB. Executions, prison sentences and beatings were not unheard of, but for the most part they relied on psychological

weapons. The method they used against us was called *Zersetzung*. This is not an easy word to translate. One possible rendering is "undermining." Another is "decay." The State, in other words, was out to undermine their own people. Their objective was to destroy us from within. They created a climate of fear and insecurity which made it impossible for anyone to trust anyone else. You could never be sure who was spying on you and who was not. The legal code was full of ill-defined offences, such as anti-social behaviour and public disparagement, which meant that practically anyone could be sent to prison if the State deemed it desirable.

To ensure that no one slipped through the cracks, we were watched, followed, listened to, and spied on. They read our mail, they interviewed our neighbours, they put pressure on our friends. They collected vast quantities of information and they kept everything on file, to be referred to as necessary. They had files on nearly half the adult population. If you requested a trip abroad, if you were being considered for a promotion, if you applied to study at a university, they would look in the file to check your security rating. A single remark might be enough to blight your career or block a trip abroad. The Stasi had 178,000 informers. The IMs were everywhere: in the office, in the tram, in the baker's, in your own house. And of course, we all knew this, and we knew that we were permanently at risk, and we were all in the habit of looking over our shoulders and watching what we said.

Why did we put up with it? How could we live like that? We emigrated, Sophie. Those of us who could left for West Germany. The rest of us emigrated into ourselves. Inner emigration is an old German tradition. It started with Goethe, who withdrew into his study to cultivate his inner life during the Napoleonic Wars, and was taken up again with some success in the Hitler period. You play music, you read books, you plant your garden, you spend time with friends. Anne always said that friendships in the DDR were much warmer and closer than in the West. She was first surprised by this, and then fascinated, and finally she succumbed to it. She never felt at home in Leipzig, but I think it was one of the reasons she decided to stay. Since the pace of life was so much slower, people had more time for each other. But basically of course, the reason we developed such strong emotional ties was to compensate for the pressure of public life and the strain of never revealing our feelings.

So we all clung together in little groups. The DDR became a niche society, where the citizens simply withdrew from the State and from public life. We were all traumatized, of course, us as much as them, by the memory of what had happened in

1953. No one wanted another bloodbath. We preferred to develop an alternative kind of existence. My own group was centred around the Collegium Musicum. It included the musicians and their families, and a few friends and supporters. Inside the group, we confided our secrets, discussed our problems, helped each other out. It was rare for the State to interfere with this kind of arrangement. As long as there was a show of public conformity, we were allowed to live privately in our niches without being disturbed. If someone protested too loudly, they were simply sent to the West. The DDR had a safety valve that none of the other East European socialist countries had. At the same time, it was a disadvantage. No dissident movement ever got off the ground in our country because the regime had the option of selling its unwanted citizens to the Federal Republic.

It was the perfect system. Regular infusions of hard cash to shore up the economy, an exit channel for potential troublemakers, a population living quietly in their niches out of sight. The trouble was, it worked too well. They undermined us so effectively that in the end, despite their efforts, they found themselves ruling a country with no people in it. You could say they were defeated by their own success.

4. THE JUDAS TREE

SOPHIE

On Saturday morning, I sent everyone off to Uzès to show Matthias the market on the Place aux Herbes. When they had gone and the house was quiet again, I crossed the terrace and unlocked the door of the studio. The trees shivered gently around the house and the sky was a pure deep blue. The cat lay prostrate in the sun. Inside the studio, everything was quiet and orderly. From the big easel in the corner, the Ambassador gazed gravely down at me. "Good morning, Your Excellency," I said. The Ambassador smiled his distant silken smile. I settled myself on a stool in front of the easel. I needed to finish the sky behind his head.

Retouching was usually the best part of any restoration. You were doing the work of the artist, putting yourself in his place, doing what you thought he would have done himself. Sometimes you could get right inside his mind, and the outside world would disappear completely, and you would be left with an incredible feeling of peace. But peace today eluded me. What I thought about as I worked was Matthias' tea party with the men from the Ministry. I couldn't get over the way they had manoeuvred him: the circumlocutions, the euphemisms, the threats clinking against the china like teaspoons - all culminating in a courteous invitation to betray a man who trusted him. It was all the more shocking because I had visited East Germany myself and noticed nothing. "How could you?" said Matthias. "It was all out of sight, and no one ever talked about it."

What really surprised me was that Anne had never talked about it either. During her summers at La Capitelle, she had told us about organ concerts in the Thomaskirche, peace prayers in the Nikolaikirche, the trip she had taken with Matthias to Poland, the visit they had made to Auschwitz. She had described the fin-de-siècle elegance of Lili's apartment, the dingy corridors of the Institute, and the stodgy charm of the Café Concerto opposite the Thomaskirche, where Matthias and Werner met to discuss Bach and Hegel and other mutual acquaintances over coffee and cheesecake. She could be entertaining when she chose. She made us laugh with the saga of Peter's struggle to get a bigger apartment, and Sonya's fight with the customs officer who tried to confiscate the pushchair she had bought for Magdalena's baby in West Berlin. But the name "Stasi" had never passed her lips.

I wondered why she had never talked about it. Matthias had never told her what he had done, but she must have known how things worked. She had been there for five years. She must have lived like everyone else, looking over her shoulder, trusting no one. It occurred to me that she could even have been approached herself. She might well have been acquainted with someone they wanted to know about. But I couldn't picture my sister sipping tea and exchanging riddles with a couple of grey-faced Stasi officials. She wouldn't have known what they were talking about. Anne had a tendency to take everything at face value. She believed implicitly what people told her. One day, Elodie and I told the younger children she had hypnotised me. I closed my eyes, she took my hand, and led me round the garden. They didn't know whether to believe her or not. In the end I had to pretend to fall into the swimming pool fully clothed to convince them. Only Anne was taken in from the start. Anne was in many ways a total innocent. I doubted the men from the Stasi would have made any headway with her at all.

*

"I remember Anne," said Martin at lunchtime.

"Of course you do," I said. I knew he didn't.

"Anne came here every year. Why did you never come with her, Matthias?"

"Because he couldn't," said Alice, helping herself to the olives they had bought in the market. "He was behind the wall and they wouldn't let him out."

Martin thought this over, and said with conviction, "No he wasn't."

"Yes he was. Anne told me."

"It's true, Martin," said Olivier. "There was a wall all the way round the country where Matthias lives, and people couldn't get out."

"That's silly," said Martin.

"Yes, it was rather," said Matthias.

"You can climb over a wall. Or else you can dig under it. I saw a film where they dug a tunnel under a wall."

"That's what happened. Some people dug tunnels. And some tried to climb over."

"Did they get away?" said Alice.

"Some of them did."

"What about the others?"

"They had to go back home," said Martin philosophically.

"That's right," I said, a little too quickly.

Alice considered us all in turn. "No, they didn't," she said contemptuously.

"They died, didn't they?"

"Some of them got killed," admitted Matthias.

"Then why don't you say so?" yelled Alice furiously. "How am I ever going to know about anything if you hide it all the time? Why won't you tell me things? Anne always told me things," she added, zeroing in instinctively on the collective weak spot, "and you never do!"

Her chair fell over with a crash as she stalked off into the house. Olivier and I exchanged exasperated glances. Matthias looked bemused. Martin registered that the field was free again.

"What you need is a death-ray laser gun and you zap the wall and it all burns up and there's no wall any more. Pow!"

"It's a pity we didn't think of that," Matthias agreed.

Martin waved his knife and fork in the air in a little jig of self-congratulation. He ate a piece of sausage. Then he leaned over and touched Matthias' sleeve. "It's Saturday today," he said confidingly. "I'm not going to school this afternoon. It's the holidays."

"What are you going to do instead?"

"We can go to the graveyard if you like."

Matthias stared at him.

"Oh God," I said.

"What now?" said Olivier.

"He thinks Matthias ought to dig up Anne and take her home with him."

"We can go there now, Matthias, while it's still light."

"He's frightened of the dark."

"No, Maman, I am not."

"I don't think we ought to do that," said Matthias. "I don't think it's a good idea."

"Wouldn't you like to take her home with you?"

"Yes, of course I would. I'd like that very much. But I don't think she would like it. I think she's happier here."

Martin's face fell. I wondered if he'd been planning this all week.

"She didn't like Leipzig very much, you see."

"Well we could put her in the garden with us then. She'd like it with us, wouldn't she?"

"We could put her under the Judas tree," said Alice, returning calmly to the table with a plate of cheese.

"The Judas tree?" said Matthias.

"That's where she always used to sit to play the violin."

"Well did she now?" said Matthias. "How appropriate." There was something so odd about his tone that we all stopped eating to stare at him.

For a moment there was silence, and then we all spoke at once.

"What are we going to do this afternoon?" said Olivier.

"Why is that appropriate?" said Alice.

"Would you like some cheese?" I said.

"When can I have a death-ray laser gun?" said Martin.

OLIVIER

When I finished medical school, I spent three months working in general practice in a small mining town in the north of France. I was young and idealistic, and - this being the 1970's - my head was full of romantic visions of Mao Tse-tung's 'barefoot doctors,' who treated workers and peasants virtually free of charge.

But it wasn't like that at all. There was nothing romantic about it. I found myself confronted with economic, social and emotional poverty of a depth I had never imagined. The town's main street was built of grimy brick. There were two or three gloomy cafés, and a few unappealing shopfronts. The inhabitants shuffled morosely from one to the other. If there had ever been any hope in that place, it was long gone. One family called me in regularly for an all-purpose consultation. When I arrived, I would find a one-hundred franc note placed prominently on a plate in the centre of the table, and the whole family, from the grandmother to the baby, sitting in a circle, with their faces washed and their hair brushed, awaiting their turn. I was expected to examine everyone, and write out a prescription covering all their maladies. I had never been so lonely in my life. I had been turned into a tradesman, and not even an honest one at that. There were no antibiotics for ignorance and deprivation and misery. What was wrong with these people, I couldn't cure.

My guess was that when Anne went to Leipzig, she found herself in a similar situation. Arriving in a place she didn't know, she had been confronted by demands she had failed to anticipate. Like me, she found herself in over her head. But, unlike me, she did not run away. After my summer in the north, I switched from medicine to psychiatry. I saw it as a better way of curing desperation. But Anne stayed in Leipzig, met Matthias and Lili, fell in love, and tried to stay afloat. Since she confided in nobody, not even her sister, it was impossible to know exactly how she managed. Her cheery accounts of East German life were clearly heavily edited. Every year, when she arrived in Uzès, she seemed ready to crack. Every year, she glowed a little less, and her skirts swirled less airily around her. Her brightness gradually dimmed. Life in the DDR was taking its toll. On her last visit home, in 1990, she had been, more than ever, silent and tense and nervous. Usually she would begin to unwind after a few days, but this time she didn't. Sophie tried to get her to talk, and so did I, but she kept us at arm's length.

At the time, we had assumed she was upset because Matthias had been unable to join her. I was beginning to wonder if it might have been something else. I had a nasty feeling that Anne had got herself into deeper waters than I had thought. How else could I explain Matthias' bitter little comment about the Judas tree?

MATTHIAS

The Judas tree, yes, what better place for you? I can picture you sitting there, frowning in concentration, absorbed in your music, shutting out everything else. Just like you did on Tuesday evenings, rehearsing with the Collegium, every Tuesday at eight, after you got back from your late class at the Institute. You used to come rushing in at the last minute, sometimes glum and preoccupied, sometimes almost euphoric. I never understood why the rehearsals affected you so strongly. Of course you refused to discuss it. When we had finished playing, you were relaxed and serene, purged of what I could only assume was stage fright. It was often on Tuesdays, I realize now, that you used to talk about Uzès and your childhood, late at night, with the wind howling and the rain buffeting against the window panes. Running away from the Thief, lying under the stars on the Warming Stone. Once you told me about a man who lived in a capitelte without electricity and running water, and who gave his

visitors tea in Limoges porcelain. You said he despised consumer society, and talked about selling your soul. I had no idea what you were talking about.

Now, of course, things are clearer. The hysterical outburst before we got married that I put down to pre-wedding nerves. The nightmares, the weeping fits of our last summer together that I ascribed to the tensions of the previous months. God knows, with the marches, the Wall, the files, the Change, we were all exhausted by then!

What I was really afraid of was that you had found someone else. Well, in a sense, you had. You promised me eternal fidelity, but on Tuesday evenings you went out to a man called Dieter. IM Judas. You went out and sold me - for what? I doubt it was thirty pieces of silver, the Ministry wasn't that generous. Was it a few small sums in Ostmarks, too small for me to notice? Or the telephone that was suddenly installed, after years of waiting, just a few weeks after our marriage?

Well, whatever it was, it really doesn't matter. Whatever they gave you, it wasn't worth what I would have given you. But you didn't let me. You kept me at a distance. You married me under false pretences. You never gave me yourself. And now I know you were Dieter's all along.

ANNE

The first two months I spent in Leipzig were the loneliest of my life. I knew no one, I had no one to talk to. I didn't like the city, I didn't like the country. I missed my home, I missed my friends, I even missed my family.

I flew to Berlin, and took the train to Leipzig. It was a rainy Saturday afternoon. The train meandered south across the Brandenburg plain, stopping in small towns where the walls of the houses were the same colour as the mud on the ground. Halfway to Leipzig, we had to wait in a station for the north-bound train to pass. Hitler's efficient railway system had been dismantled by the Soviets in the aftermath of the Treaty of Potsdam, and the rail link between the DDR's two principal cities was reduced to a single-track line. The streets of the villages we passed were empty, and the houses looked half abandoned. There were no advertising hoardings, no coloured signs, no illuminated display windows. I was stunned by the lack of life and colour

and movement. It felt as though the country had been frozen in time. Someone had waved a magic wand and stupefied people and places alike.

Leipzig was the same. The Innenstadt, with its mixture of decrepit old buildings and tacky new ones, at least had some semblance of life. There were shoppers eyeing the stores on the Grimmaische-Strasse, and students lingering in the desolate concrete courtyard of the university. But once past the ring road, the city petered out into quiet tree-filled squares, overgrown cobbled streets, and bombed out buildings that seemed to have stood untouched since the war. Weeds grew out of the ruins: in some places the shapes of walls had been entirely swallowed up. Leipzig was becalmed on the shores of history. Life had run down. The people on the streets wore grey anoraks and shabby shoes. They moved with caution. On the trams, they gazed round suspiciously at their fellow passengers. In public places, no one spoke above a whisper. They stared with disapproval at my coloured Western clothes, but lowered their eyes if I tried to meet their gaze. Walking along the street to the Institute for my first day at work, I saw a message on the wall that read: *Zahme Vögel singen von Freiheit, wilde Vögel fliegen. Tame birds sing of freedom, wild birds fly.* I wasn't quite sure what it meant, but it struck me as ominous. When I looked for it again on my way home, and saw that no trace of it remained, I found it more ominous still. I began to sense what kind of place I was in.

I had been given a flat in a newly-built housing complex in the suburbs. The building was a Plattenbau, a prefabricated unit made of huge concrete slabs. The flat had never been lived in, but it was already falling apart. There was a vast floor-to-ceiling crack in a corner of the sitting room. The workers had left the place strewn with assorted debris, and the removal men had simply dumped my things on top of it. The flats were in the middle of a residential wilderness with no shops nor services anywhere nearby. There weren't even any phones. My next-door neighbours were a young couple expecting their first baby, and for the time being, only the husband was in residence. His wife, eight months pregnant, was sleeping on her parents' sofa until the baby was born.

For the first couple of weeks, I tried to convince myself that bourgeois comforts such as telephones and shops were unnecessary. I tried to tell myself that people here had chosen to make certain sacrifices in the name of building socialism. My mother had been telling me for years that the DDR was the "better" Germany, and I did my utmost to accept that she was right. My mother believed that the DDR had been

created by people with impeccable moral credentials. They had fought the Fascists, and they did not tolerate the war criminals, SS officers, concentration camp guards and other Nazi leftovers that the Federal Republic had blithely taken to its bosom (such as my grandfather). Nor had they been contaminated by the vulgar materialistic values of the West. What I was going to find in Leipzig, according to my mother, was the moral high ground and the triumph of socialism.

It didn't take long to realize she was wrong. I was sitting in the Number 13 tram on my way home to Grünau, after a wasted afternoon trying to buy coat-hangers. Apparently there wasn't a coat-hanger to be had in the whole of Leipzig. When I asked the saleslady in the biggest department store if she knew when they would be coming in, she gave me an odd look and said, "Why don't *you* tell me that? I just work here." I was still trying to make sense of that remark when the tram slowed to navigate a sharp turn between two of the new high-rise buildings. I glanced out of the window, and found myself looking at an enormous hole in the wall of the building beside me. I stared at it in amazement. The hole was several inches deep. The plaster had come off and a grubby swathe of crumbling concrete was visible underneath. By the look of it, it had been there for some time. No one was doing anything about it, and it was gradually getting bigger.

That hole was an epiphany, in more ways than one. It made me realize what the Workers' and Peasants' State was really like. The DDR was decaying, and nobody cared enough to repair it. The DDR was not the better Germany, it was the failed Germany. My mother had it all wrong. She had allowed her prejudices about the Federal Republic to blind her to the truth about its socialist alter ego. Too late, it occurred to me that she had never set foot in the DDR in her life. She claimed she would never get a visa because of her father. I began to wonder if that was true, or if she was merely doing her best to preserve her illusions.

I tried to talk to the people I met, my neighbours in the building, and my colleagues at the Foreign Languages Institute. I needed someone to explain the presence of that hole. I would have liked someone to prove that I was wrong. All I met with was polite evasiveness. No one was interested in discussing anything with a foreigner. So for a time I abandoned human contact. I took refuge in books, the way I always had. I avoided the staff room at the Institute, where no one ever talked to me, and I stuck to a curt 'Guten Tag' on the way in and out of my building in Grünau. During weekends, I went to museums, read voraciously, and played the violin.

And then at a concert at the Gewandhaus, I ran into Silke. She was my Betreuer, my minder, one of the two people who were responsible for me during my stay. The other was a French professor at the University. Silke was a fellow teacher at the Institute. She had asked me to tea at her flat one day, but since then had done little more than express the hope that I was getting on all right when she passed me in the corridor. That night at the Gewandhaus, she was friendlier than I had ever seen her. She mentioned that she played the viola, and was enchanted to hear that I played the violin. She had a friend with her whom she introduced as Dieter, and the pair of them took me off for a drink after the performance. We went to the Moritzbastei, a students' club housed in a sixteenth-century bastion that had once formed part of the town fortifications. The bastion was built below street level, and the entrance was at the bottom of a long flight of steps. The atmosphere was different to anywhere I had been in Leipzig. There was jazz playing in the background. People were drinking and talking: some of them were even laughing. The atmosphere was sedate for a Saturday night, but at least it wasn't stuffy.

We found a table in a vaulted cellar on the third level below the street. Dieter went to get drinks, and Silke asked me what I thought of it. I had classified Silke as a dull Saxon lump with not much in her head. At the Institute, she taught Portuguese, a language much sought after in the DDR on account of economic and military aid to Angola and Mozambique. She did not appear to enjoy her work. She plodded round the corridors with a heavy tread and a gloomy expression. But tonight she was much livelier. The discovery of a fellow musician seemed to have speeded her up, and she sounded as though she was genuinely interested in hearing my opinion. So I said it was great, and it was a pity there weren't more places like this, and she asked if I was missing France, and I said I was, and she asked what I missed in particular, so I mumbled something about my friends and the sun and the cafés and the way of life. In the middle of this trite recital, Dieter came back with three glasses of white wine, that dreadful sweet stuff which was all you could get in East Germany, and with great earnestness proposed a toast to Peace and Friendship. So we drank to Peace and Friendship, and then he proposed another toast to me, and said that he hoped that my year in the DDR would be of value both to me and to his country, and that I would make new friends to make up for those I had left behind in France.

"You will not find many cafés here, of course," he went on, looking at me with an unexpected glint of humour. "We Protestants do not care for such things. We

think they are sinful and time-wasting. They interfere with the business of our moral improvement. If you want cafés, I am afraid you will have to go to Poland and visit the Catholics."

"Really?" I said cautiously. I wasn't sure if he was making fun of me.

"It's true," said Silke. "I've been to Warsaw several times. The Poles are quite different from us. They take things less seriously. I don't know if it's because they're Catholics, though," she added, glancing dubiously at Dieter.

"Of course it is," he said. "They go to confession every week and tell everything to the priest and he absolves them and that's it. Whatever their sins were, they don't have to worry about them any more. But Protestants are alone with God, and we can never get free of our guilt, and it weighs us down and makes us miserable."

"Are you a Protestant?" I asked.

He smiled suddenly. "No, of course not. I don't believe in God. But you mustn't overlook the importance of cultural conditioning. If you grow up in a society where people have believed in such things for generations, obviously these ideas are going to rub off on you, even though you may not be aware of it. And so we are a very glum society here. Is that what you meant when you said you missed the French way of life?"

"Not entirely," I said, and told him about the hole. He expressed just the right degree of rueful surprise, and asked just the right kind of questions about what else I had seen to upset me.

It was such a relief to have someone interested in me at last. Tramping through all those museums, spending solitary evenings in my flat, I had begun to doubt my own reality. That evening in the Moritzbastei, I began to revive. Under Dieter's encouraging smile, it all came pouring out. Everything that had bothered me since I got there, all the stuff I had not been able to make sense of. Everything from the building debris and the coathanger saleslady, to the petty regulations at the Institute and the impossibility of finding an orchestra to play with. And then, remembering that I was a guest in their country, I added belatedly that everything was new and strange, and I was sure it would all get better.

"Please don't apologize," said Dieter. "It's very useful for us to hear what an outsider thinks."

"You should have told me you were looking for an orchestra," said Silke. "I can get you an audition with the Collegium Musicum."

"Our state is not perfect, but it is trying to progress," said Dieter. "We are open to criticism, absolutely. You should not apologize for telling us what you see."

"Before we can make progress, we need to know what is wrong," said Silke. "The saleslady, by the way, probably thought you were nomenklatura."

I stared. "Why would she think that?"

"The way you dress," said Silke. "It shows that you are not an ordinary East German. But your German is good, very good, and you don't sound like a foreigner. In Berlin, they would probably take you for a West German. But in here in Leipzig, there are no West Germans. So she assumed that you were East German, but from a privileged background. Someone with access to special stores, maybe even with permission to travel abroad."

"You know," said Dieter, "you should tell us every time you see something that strikes you as a problem. It would be very helpful if you did that. You see Silke every day at the Institute, all you have to do is take her aside and tell her, Silke, I have seen such and such. That's all. And then she will pass it on to me."

For the first time, a note of alarm sounded. It occurred to me that I knew nothing about this man except that he was a friend of Silke's. "And what will you do? Where do you work exactly?"

"Oh I work for the Town Hall. But that's not the point. You see, I am a Party member, and so I can pass on your remarks to higher-placed comrades. Naturally, I will not mention you. I will pass on what you say as if it were my own observations. But what you have said tonight is exceedingly useful - don't you think so, Silke?"

"Oh definitely," said Silke.

"It's rare to find an observer like you, someone who is perceptive and who understands what she is seeing - no, no, it's true. I mean it, I'm not trying to flatter you. And so if you would be willing to give us your impressions of the things you see - things like your hole in the wall - and how they strike you, it would be invaluable. We're too used to problems like that, we simply don't notice them any more. The same for the people you meet, what they think, what they say to you. It's so useful to get a different perspective. The thing is- " He paused and glanced carefully round the cellar. "I should perhaps not be telling you this, and you will please not repeat it, but there are several of us who think," he lowered his voice, "in Leipzig and elsewhere,

that things should not be allowed to go on in quite the way they have been doing. We believe we need to reform. And if we have people like you willing to help us, then that will make things much easier. We need to understand what is wrong. We need to know what things are like in other countries."

He went on talking. After a while, I stopped listening. I didn't need to hear any more. I was convinced. As we climbed the long flight of steps back to the street, Silke told me a bit about the Collegium Musicum. She would talk to the organizers, who were called Matthias and Magdalena, and tell me what they said on Monday. She would wait for me at lunchtime in the staff room. When I caught the tram back to Grünau, I felt quite different to when I set out.

5. LE ROCHER DES DOMS

SOPHIE

On Sunday afternoon, the weather broke and it began to rain. Olivier made a fire in the sitting room, and got some beer out of the fridge, and he and Matthias settled themselves on either side of the chimney. Next door in the kitchen, I prepared a chicken for supper. The children were in their rooms, supposedly getting their things together for the ski trip. Mehemed Jaid was ready to go back to Emmanuelle, there was no homework for Monday morning, and I was calmer than I had been at the end of a weekend for several years.

My unaccustomed serenity was entirely due to Matthias. After less than a week, it felt as though he had always lived here and always been part of the family. He fitted in, he made no waves. He was so low-key he calmed everybody down. He still reminded me of a bear, but a benevolent one, who went quietly about his business. He made me feel that his strength would rub off on me simply by being beside him. I was beginning to understand what Anne had found in him.

The previous day, we had hired canoes and gone down the river to the Pont du Gard. Matthias had eyed his craft nervously, but embarked without protest, though he let Alice do most of the paddling. When we got back, he gave her a cello lesson in exchange. It went so well that on Sunday morning she demanded another. Olivier's family were not musical, and I had spurned on principle my mother's efforts to make me learn the piano. So far there had been no evidence that our children might have inherited the talents of my mother and my sister. Anne's violin had been lying at the bottom of my wardrobe for three years without either Alice or Martin showing the slightest interest in it.

When the lesson was over, Alice and Matthias stayed talking quietly in a corner of the terrace, with the cello propped beside them. From time to time, Alice reached out and stroked it thoughtfully, as if it were an animal she was trying to tame. Eavesdropping from the kitchen window, I overheard Matthias telling Alice that the cello was the instrument closest to the human voice, and that it was therefore particularly appropriate that the great Russian cellist Rostropovich should have gone to Berlin as the Wall was coming down and sat on somebody's kitchen chair and

played to celebrate the crowds streaming through into the West. Alice listened, uncharacteristically silent, with a look on her face I had never seen before.

With Matthias there, the children were calmer, and so was Olivier. Instead of rushing round from one place to another all weekend as he usually did, he stayed at home, talked to Matthias, and took everyone for a bike ride to Saint Maximin, where they managed to convince Martin that Anne was happier where she was. Definitely a successful weekend. It was a pity, it occurred to me, that Matthias had never accompanied Anne when she came to stay. Even though she and I had got on much better during those summers at La Capitelle, the mood had sometimes lurched from hilarity to bitterness at a speed that alarmed both of us. Once I had asked if it never worried her that Matthias was nearly old enough to be her father, and she looked at me oddly.

"Don't forget I never had a father, Sophie. You did, but not me."

"You had a mother." I hadn't been expecting that kind of response, and I lashed back instinctively.

"You always say that, but it's not true. I didn't have a mother, I had a best friend."

"Right. The only one who understood her." I was shocked to hear the resentment in my voice.

"Have you any idea what a burden that is at age ten?"

Beneath our new-found complicity, the old distrust ran deep. If Matthias had been there to calm us down, I suspected it might never have emerged. Olivier had been content to keep his distance, and observe us both with a slightly clinical eye. He claimed it would be counter-productive for him to intervene in our relationship. We needed, he said, to work it through ourselves.

I peeled the potatoes and listened with half an ear to the men's conversation next door. Olivier explained about the annual ski trip and asked how much longer Matthias would be staying. Would he still be here when they got back? Matthias' answer was evasive. He still hadn't told me why he had come, and nor had I figured it out. Olivier's theory that Anne had been having an affair was obviously implausible, but so far I had not managed to come up with a hypothesis of my own. Was it something to do with this Werner that Matthias had talked about? I wondered if Olivier would try to worm it out of him, but Olivier was busy describing the mountains and the chalet and the air and the pistes. I began to spoon stuffing into the chicken. I never went

along on these ski trips. Olivier's parents owned a chalet big enough to sleep vast numbers of people, and the whole family traditionally went up to the Alps during the spring holidays. Olivier's brother Bernard would be driving up from Nice with his children, who were about the same age as Alice and Martin. The grandparents would be waiting for them, and a variety of assorted cousins and aunts would also make an appearance.

Quite apart from the fact that I didn't enjoy the snow, it all made me slightly claustrophobic. I liked my family-in-law as individuals, but I couldn't handle them all at once. I had never been good at large groups. Fortunately, I was not the only one to react this way: Bernard's wife Isabelle couldn't take it either. By now, everyone was used to it. The daughters-in-law were dismissed as eccentrics, and promptly forgotten. After an hour, no one even noticed our absence. Isabelle, a lawyer, used pressure of work as her official facesaver, and I generally made sure I had an urgent commission to finish. This year, of course, it wasn't necessary. Matthias was here, and my alibi was foolproof.

"Maman, I've finished," said Martin, wandering into the kitchen as I put the chicken in the oven.

I looked at him sceptically. "Did you get out your warm socks like I told you to?"

"Will I need socks?" said Martin.

"I think you might," I said. "Come on, the chicken will be all right for a bit, let's go and look for them."

When I got back, Matthias was on his second beer, Olivier had switched to pastis, and they were two-thirds of the way through a large bag of corn chips that I had been keeping for the car tomorrow. Olivier was briefing Matthias for his meeting with my mother. "As a teenager, Luise revolted against her father," he was saying, "but deep down, she's still Daddy's little girl."

But then the phone rang, and I missed the rest. The caller was Emmanuelle, who wanted to remind me that she was expecting us on Tuesday. She had something to show Matthias, she said, but she wasn't going to tell me what it was because that would spoil the surprise. The surprise, whatever it was, must have been important, because she said that we could come at three if we wanted instead of four. Did Germans drink tea? she asked me anxiously.

LUISE

The happiest time of my life was when I was a little girl growing up in Germany before the war. Things were quite different then, my father was home nearly all the time, and he used to play with me and take me on excursions. When we walked down the street, I remember how they used to turn their heads to look at Vati in his magnificent black uniform holding his little blonde daughter by the hand. On fine days we would sit in the garden and drink lemonade, and sometimes you could hear the sound of the piano coming across the lawn from the house next door. Oh, it was such a pity it all had to change! Without the war, our lives would have been so different. I was four and a half when the war began, and things were never the same after that. After the war, Germany was a completely different place, and I never felt I belonged there. I was just a schoolgirl, I didn't know anything about what had happened, you can't understand things like that at ten years old, but when I went over to my friends' houses after school, their parents sometimes looked at me sideways, and it was clear I wasn't welcome. It wasn't my fault that my father was in the SS, how could it be, but at ten years old I was already paying for what he had done. The sins of the fathers, have you ever heard that expression?

It wasn't until I got to France that I felt I could breathe. Provincial France has its drawbacks, mind you, I think I'd have been happier if I could have stayed in Paris, but Julien had to get back to Uzès for the shop, and of course the countryside here is lovely. If I'd had the choice, I don't think I'd have gone into teaching, but in a small town like Uzès or Avignon, you don't really have a choice, at least you didn't in those days. If Julien had let me do more in the shop, it would have been different, but it was always his shop, his way of doing things, and if you made a suggestion he simply ignored it.

I would have done quite well in a shop of my own, I've always had a talent for decoration, not just antiques, but a mixture of things, they sell such lovely things in those little boutiques nowadays, but of course back then there was never enough money to set me up in business on my own. All the money we had went into the antique shop. Well in a way it might have been for the best, the teaching I mean, I've always thought it's nice to be able to show that German isn't just an ugly guttural language that you use to bellow out orders, but that in the hands of someone like Goethe or Rilke it can be beautiful too, and that Germans aren't all fat West German

bankers making money. I was so glad when Anne decided to go to the DDR rather than the Federal Republic for her studies, I really do feel that it was the better Germany. They weren't materialists like we were in the West, they had ideals, they had a soul, and their society was less polluted because of that. I think it's a shame about reunification, it would have been so much nicer if the two Germanies had survived, all they had to do was to get rid of the old communists and let the new generation take charge. But they missed the opportunity, and now all they think about is how to make money, just like in the West. Life is such a series of disappointments, isn't it? Things just seem to go from bad to worse.

Look at me now: I've lost my husband and both my daughters, Anne was lost to me for years before she was killed, I never understood how she could have cut herself off from her family and gone to live so far away. It was very hard for me when Anne got married, I had a unique relationship with Anne, she was one of the few people who understood me, I haven't had an easy life, but she always supported me even from the time she was small, 'Du bist *meine* Mutter,' she used to say when she was tiny. She was always such a bright, cheerful child. It was a pleasure to be with her. She was my friend as well as my daughter in many ways. When Julien and I divorced, and I moved to Avignon, she came with me, she was in her next to last year at the lycée, and we lived here together in this flat until she went off to university in Montpellier, it was so nice, just the two of us, we used to have such lovely times together. Anne and I were always very alike, and we always liked the same kinds of things.

It was never the same with Sophie. It's amazing how different two children can be. Sophie rejected me right from the start, she never had any time for me, all she ever wanted to do was go to her grandmother's and sit on the floor and draw. She never had an ounce of her sister's charm. She refused to learn the piano, she refused to learn German - she wouldn't speak a word of German to this day if we hadn't forced her to learn it at school. I've never met such a hostile child, she was so sarcastic as a teenager, you couldn't say anything without getting your head bitten off. And now she never comes to see me, she's always too busy, she's taking the children somewhere, she says, but she never brings them to see me, I don't think I see my grandchildren more than twice a year, it never occurs to Sophie to suggest it, she's just like all the rest, no one ever bothers to wonder what I want. My parents certainly didn't, and my

husband was just the same. Life is really so unfair. I've gone from one misfortune to another ever since I was born.

When the war broke out, my father was posted to the Eastern Front, and for several years I hardly saw him, I missed him so badly, it was very hard on me. Alone with my mother, it wasn't the same at all. Children need a father's influence, look at my own daughters, there's a case in point, why do you think they both rushed off to get married and live away from home as soon as they could? When Vati came home, he was quieter than he used to be, and he didn't talk as much. Sometimes when I was out of the room, he talked to my mother, in a voice so low that I couldn't hear it from the hall, a lot of the time he talked in half-sentences, and so did she, or else they exchanged glances that I couldn't understand. I never asked what they were talking about. From the way they were talking, I knew they wouldn't tell me. Once I saw them sitting together at the kitchen table, talking so quietly they were almost whispering. Vati seemed unusually grave, but I could tell from the flush in her cheeks that my mother was excited. I stayed in the hall, and watched through the crack in the door, and strained my ears to hear what they were saying. Prisoners? she said. Yes, he said, in the forest outside the town, ten or fifteen. It was the right thing to do, she said. Don't worry about it, Ernst.

It was years before I understood the significance of that conversation, but when it finally dawned on me what they had been talking about, I came right out and asked her about it. She knew exactly what I meant. It was no more than they deserved, she said, the Poles were an inferior race, and the Führer knew what he was doing. My mother was a Nazi till the day she died. She was a member of the Bund Deutscher Mädel before she got married, the female equivalent of the Hitler Youth, and I don't think she ever changed her mind about her Führer. My father had the courage to recognize the truth, but she never did.

In 1944 Vati was transferred to Auschwitz. It was a promotion, my mother was delighted, and she and I were meant to join him there, but we didn't have time, because after one week in the camp, he volunteered to return to the Front, this time in a fighting capacity. My mother was furious, I remember that very clearly. For two years after that, we didn't see him at all. When he came home from Russia in 1946, he managed to get a job as a civil servant, and from then on he spent most of the day at his office. When he was at home, he would sit in an armchair and just stare into space, he didn't read, he didn't listen to the radio, he hardly spoke. He was so changed, it was

as though a light had gone out in him, I couldn't believe it was the same man. I was so disappointed, I had been so looking forward to his coming back. I had started singing lessons while he had been away, and I was the best in my class, I had thought he would be proud of me, but when I asked him to come and hear me sing, he just shook his head. He didn't have his black uniform any more, and he hardly ever went out. When I asked questions, he wouldn't answer them, he would just look at me without saying a word, sometimes he really frightened me. Looking back, I think he frightened my mother too. For a while she used to hold conversations in which she provided both the questions and the answers, and then she stopped talking too. She had never been what you might call an affectionate mother, but now she started getting more and more withdrawn, and soon she had no time for me at all.

That was when I got into the habit of visiting my grandparents. They lived only a few streets away, but I had never seen much of them before, because Karl and my father didn't get on. Karl was my grandmother's second husband. My real grandfather had been killed in World War I, and after that my grandmother had sold the estates in East Prussia, moved south to her cousins in Schweinfurt, and married a worker from the local ball-bearings factory. Her son Ernst, my father, was about twenty at the time and he was furious, partly because Karl wasn't at all our social equal, we had been landowners after all, and partly because he was a Communist. In the end, my father left home and joined the army. Later, he joined the Nazi Party, and after that the SS. Twenty years later, he still wouldn't speak to Karl, the feud had never healed, if anything it got worse. Even during the war, when my father was away at the Front, and Karl was in prison, my mother and grandmother had never grown close - well, later I found out why. But right after the war, when everything was so gloomy, I was glad to escape to my grandparents' flat where everything was so much more cheerful than at home, with Oma kneading dough in the kitchen, on the days she managed to get hold of some flour, that is, you can't imagine how bad things were in Germany after the war, and Karl reading the newspaper, and his workmates from the factory dropping in to discuss the affairs of the day, the Nuremberg Trials and so on, and their neighbours tapping on the door to borrow a carrot and exchange the latest gossip. In some ways, it was a happy time, even though nobody had anything and the country was in ruins, people weren't so obsessed by material comfort in those days, it wasn't like now, they were just happy that the war was over.

My mother didn't like me spending so much time with Oma and Karl, she was a military officer's daughter, and an even worse snob than my father, but she didn't stop me going. My father didn't say anything, even though he must have known I would eventually find out what he had done to Karl. I suppose he didn't care.

By the time I found out what had happened, I was fourteen and starting to understand what had happened under the Nazis, but since neither of my parents would tell me anything, I had to find things out on my own. I talked to Karl, I talked to teachers at school, and I used to spend a lot of time in the library too. I asked my parents about everything I found, did they remember this or that event, did they take part in them personally, what did they think of such and such? My father clammed up even more and refused to discuss it, and my mother insisted that she had known nothing, seen nothing, suspected nothing, I knew she wasn't telling the truth, because I found that, oddly enough, I could remember things myself. I was walking past the house next door one day, when a lady came out, and all at once I realized that she wasn't the same lady who had lived there when I was small, the one who used to play the piano on summer afternoons, and then I suddenly remembered what had happened to the piano. All of a sudden, it just came back to me, they had thrown it out of the window on to the pavement, it must have been Kristallnacht, I could remember men running all over the place and shouting and breaking the windows and throwing the furniture out on to the street. It had frightened me so much that it stuck in my memory, even though it was 1938 and I was only small at the time. Well, if I remembered something like that, you'd think my parents would, but my father just said he wasn't there, and my mother said there was a lot of nonsense talked about the Jews and that in any case she didn't recollect.

And then I found out what my father had done to Karl.

I went straight home to see him, I needed to confront him with it right away. He was sitting in his chair as usual, and when I told him that I knew what had happened, he didn't say a word, he sat there and listened while I told him what Karl had told me, and then he got up and went out of the room and closed the door behind him. I was stunned. So it was true? I realized I had been hoping he would deny it.

And then my mother came in, she had been listening in the kitchen all the time. "You shouldn't have said that, Luise. You should leave your father in peace. He went through enough during the war. He fought for his country, and he saw terrible things. He's earned the right not to think about it any more." She went on and on. She said

my father hadn't gone through all this pain and sacrifice to hear himself being accused of things like this, I was being ungrateful, I should pull myself together, work hard in school, and think of other people for a change.

It was then that I realized that I would have to leave. What kind of country was it that allowed an SS officer with lives on his hands to come home quietly and get a job in the civil service? What kind of family was it that betrayed each other, denounced each other, and then simply behaved as though nothing had happened? As the child of people like that, I was doomed from the start.

MATTHIAS

I was anticipating gnarled features and a black cloak and possibly claws. Definitely a witch's hat, and why not a broomstick? Neither Anne nor Sophie seemed to possess a photo of their mother, so I had no idea what to expect. Olivier said she had never grown up, but that gave me no clue as to how she looked. I found myself shaking hands with a fragile-looking woman in late middle age. Her blonde hair was fading into grey, but it was easy to see that she had once been extremely beautiful.

"Matthias," she said, placing her hand briefly in mine. "How lovely. It's taken you such a long time to get here. Well of course it's a long way. I suppose with Anne gone, you didn't think it worth your while."

She led us into the sitting room, and urged us to sit down. The room was small but charming, with oak beams, polished floorboards, and a lot of good antiques. There was a soothing blend of colours, and a intriguing mix of objects: lacquer boxes and dried flowers, brass candlesticks and patchwork cushions. The afternoon sun streamed in through the open French windows. I glimpsed geraniums hanging from the balcony rail, and a pleasant square beyond.

Avignon had a lazy, slightly shabby air. It was less manicured than Uzès, and less carefully restored. The Renaissance palaces and Baroque churches were mixed in with some astonishingly ugly modern buildings. On the way to Luise's flat, we had gone past council flats, Arab butchers and video rental stores. We had seen mothers with pushchairs, workers renovating a restaurant, schoolchildren shuffling home. Ordinary people leading ordinary lives. Instead of a Duchy, there was a Préfecture. It occurred to me that Anne might have been easier to understand if she had grown up in

this comfortable southern town, rather than in the enclosed, subtle atmosphere of Uzès.

I took a green velvet armchair, and Sophie took a pink one on the opposite side of the room. Luise served us tea in English china, and almond biscuits from the confectioner's across the road. For the time being, there was no mention of Anne. Instead Luise told us about the choir director who was incapable of blending the sopranos with the contraltos, and the tenor who sang Jesus who didn't articulate properly, and the headmistress of the lycée who didn't appreciate the difficulty of her situation, and the thirteen-year-olds who didn't listen, and the sixteen-year-olds who weren't interested. It wasn't like that when she started teaching. Things had changed so much since she was young. Sophie drank her tea and made no comment. I suspected she wasn't listening.

"And now you're here," said Luise, moving on to the most recent of her tribulations. She switched into German to underline the seriousness of the problem, emphasizing slightly the second person pronoun. "Und jetzt sind *Sie* da." She sipped her tea from the delicate china cup and looked me over with wide baby-blue eyes. "I must say it's rather unfair of you to come here now. It's been such a long time. We were all beginning to come to terms with the situation, and now you appear and it all starts up again. You should have come when it happened and then we could all have moved on."

Sophie cut in sharply in French. "Maman, you're being rude."

Luise ignored her. "I was bereft when Anne died, totally bereft. You won't be able to understand that, Matthias, will you? You don't know what it feels like to lose a child."

"He knows what it feels like to lose a wife," said Sophie, still in French, and Luise winced. "In any case, he couldn't come any earlier."

"Why couldn't he?"

Her eyes moved from Sophie to me. "It was difficult," I said lamely. Luise was still speaking German, so I did too. She was wearing an odd but stylish garment in an unusual shade of pale blue that matched her eyes, with a hem that dipped dramatically on one side. I couldn't sense that she had any more connection to Anne than Julien did, and Sophie too seemed totally unrelated to both her parents. She and Luise had no mannerisms in common, and, as far as I could tell, no patterns of speech, though that was hardly surprising if they always communicated in different languages. Sophie's

German, as I knew from her visit to Leipzig, was more than adequate, but I had noticed she never spoke it if she could help it.

"It was too painful for him, Maman," said Sophie crossly. "Is that so hard to grasp?"

"He should have made the effort. It would have been better for everyone."

"Maybe, but he's here now, and you could at least be polite to him."

"Seeing him only brings Anne back to me. You don't seem to understand what a terrible loss it was for me. But then you never have. You- "

"It was a terrible loss for Matthias too."

"He had her for five years. The last five years of her life. All that time I had no one." She turned to look at me. I wondered if her father, the Standartenführer, had had the same implacable light blue gaze. "Can you imagine how hard it was for me, Matthias? She never wrote, she never phoned. I was entirely alone. That would be your doing, of course, you'd have stopped her from communicating with me. Don't imagine I don't know what was going on. You wanted to cut her off from her family, you wanted her all to yourself. You never thought about a mother's feelings."

"Maman, you're being ridiculous!"

"Anne was my best friend as well as my daughter. She was the only person I could really count on. I was destroyed when she went to Germany. No, Sophie, don't interrupt. I want him to know this. He needs to know what his responsibility is in all of this."

"All of what?" I asked. "What exactly do you think I'm responsible for?"

Luise didn't miss a beat. "All my life, I've gone from one misfortune to another. If my real grandfather hadn't got himself killed in the first war, the whole of my life would have turned out differently. We would have kept the estates, my grandmother would never have remarried, there would never have been the rift in the family."

"The estates were in East Prussia, Maman. You'd have lost them anyway after World War Two."

"The way they all behaved was so inconsiderate. Karl should have known better than to leave those things lying round. Though I suppose he never imagined that his own stepson would go to the Gestapo and denounce him."

I put my cup down sharply. "What?"

"A member of his own family, even if he was a worker and a communist!"

"What did you say?"

"Oh, didn't Anne tell you about that? My grandfather was in the Resistance, you know. Ernst, my father, turned him in to the Gestapo on suspicion of anti-Nazi activities. He found an anti-Nazi leaflet when he was visiting his mother. Karl spent three years in jail after that, but my father didn't care, he was such a fanatic in those days. I always thought it was a pity he was never put on trial. It would have been better if everything had come out, instead of sweeping it under the carpet like they tried to do. His own stepfather! A member of his family!"

"Why does that surprise you?" said Sophie tartly. "It's amazing what people can do to members of their families."

*

Outside, the sun still shone. On the Rocher des Doms, the gardens were in bloom. We walked across the park towards the river. Neither of us spoke. Old men sat on the benches, and embracing lovers sprawled on the grass. Was there no end to it? Was there still more to come? How much more had she hidden that I still didn't know? Sophie glanced at me anxiously. I didn't trust myself to speak. We reached the edge of the park, above the river, and the roofs of Avignon unfolded in a maze of sun-drenched colour. I felt dizzy and tired and aching and slightly sick. I had thought I knew Anne's family history, and I had thought I accepted it. But that was before I heard about the man who denounced his stepfather to the Gestapo. Oddly enough, she had never mentioned that. The day we took a walk on the Fockelberg, she had left it out of her account of her family history. Even at Auschwitz, she had never referred to that.

We rounded a bend and a white mediaeval fortress came into view. Villeneuve-lès-Avignon, said Sophie. I peered at it incredulously. It looked like something out of a Book of Hours. From where we stood, looking across the river, you might think you were still in the Middle Ages. I half expected to see damsels in strange pointed headdresses leaning down from the battlements, and knights on caparisoned chargers prancing off to war. At this moment, I would have liked nothing better than to ride off too and leave them all behind, Anne, Sophie, Ernst, Luise, and their terrible shared past. But I was not from a war-waging family. My father had stayed quietly at home in Leipzig during the war, rejected by the Army for chronic short-sightedness. I had performed my own military service without distinction, and retreated thankfully into my eighteenth-century niche at the end of it.

But Anne's grandfather had been posted to the East. By now we knew exactly what that meant. We had all watched the documentaries and seen the photos. Ernst would have been one of the SS officers who bellowed orders in the dripping Eastern forests, and watched the naked people shuffling into position on the edge of the graves they had dug for themselves. Maybe he had forced them to take the spades and dig. Maybe he had fired the shots that killed them. Or maybe he had just given the orders and watched them being carried out. But they had made him a Standartenführer, so he must have done something. You didn't get to be a Colonel in the SS by staying on the sidelines. What was it that had made him sit in his armchair for so many years without speaking? Was it his service in the East? Was it the week in Auschwitz? Or was it the betrayal of his mother's husband?

"Matthias, are you all right?"

"Yes, fine."

"No you aren't, you look terrible."

"No, really- "

"It's Anne, isn't it?" We had been walking side by side along the path overlooking the river, but now she pivoted towards me and took hold of my jacket, forcing me to stop. "It has to be Anne. Why did you come here? What did she do to you?"

I opened my mouth, but no sound came out. How could I tell her this about her sister?

"Was it the Stasi?" She shook the lapels of the jacket. We stood there facing each other. "Tell me, Matthias!"

And then I found my voice, and it all came pouring out. "Yes, Sophie, it was the Stasi. Your sister worked for the Stasi. She betrayed a member of her family, just like her grandfather. She informed on her husband. She informed on me. For four years she reported on everything I said and thought and felt and did. I saw the file. She told them everything. She had a Stasi handler called Dieter, she met him on Tuesdays in a safe flat on the other side of town, and she told him everything about me. My eating habits, my illnesses, what time I got up in the morning. She gave me away, piece by piece. She took all my dirty little secrets and turned them inside out and held them up for public view. I can't tell you how it feels to read things like that about yourself. You feel as though you've been invaded. Your body is not your own, your life is not

your own. You don't exist. You've been dated and signed and analyzed and picked apart. You've been reduced to a paper in a file."

ALICE

Maman, pick up the phone. You must be there, you can't be working at this time of night. Pick up please! Oh God, it's not true. What if I were a client, you wouldn't get work any more, and we'd all starve..... All right then, don't pick up. We got here all right, and we're all fine. Charlotte and Bruno are here too, they got here just before we did, and Bruno's feet have got so big that when we went to rent our skis he had to have size forty. We're going skiing tomorrow right after breakfast. Papa says we're going to get up early and we- What? Oh. Martin says you've gone to see Mamie and that's why you aren't there. He says she's locked you in the cellar so she can tell you what things were like when she was a little girl and you can't get up and go. Well if that's why you aren't home yet, I forgive you. Now listen, Maman, I have something important to tell you. There's a letter in the violin case in an envelope addressed to Matthias. I think it's in German. I found it yesterday when I was packing and then you called us to supper and I forgot about it. So if Matthias wants to read it, that's where it is. In the violin case, I mean, on the bottom shelf of your wardrobe behind your sweaters. I took your black sweater, by the way, I hope that's all right. Maman, do you think I could have cello lessons instead of dancing classes next year? That's all, I've got to go now. Papa says we all have to go to bed so we can get up in the morning. I hope Mamie lets you out soon. Bonne nuit.

MATTHIAS

By Stasi standards, I was small fry. I had two IMs, Fräulein Schroeder had told me. I was relieved there weren't more. The number of volumes in one's file and the number of IMs assigned to report on one was becoming something of a status symbol in certain circles, but that was a competition I had no desire to take part in. Werner had had nine IMs, some of them quite good friends. "The thing is," Fräulein Schroeder continued, "it seems that one of your IMs was a person very close to you. We don't

know exactly who. It's my job, you know, to warn you about this, and I'm afraid it may come as a shock."

I thanked her for her warning, but I already had a good idea what I was going to find. I had suspected Magdalena of contacts with the Stasi for some time, and I wanted to confirm my suspicions once and for all. If they turned out to be correct, I had resolved to dissolve the Collegium Musicum. I couldn't go on playing with someone who had informed on me.

The reports made by the IMs were in the second part of the file. It was stamped with the letters OPK. That meant Operational Person Control. This was the file the Stasi had compiled on me. The first page was an Opening Report, compiled in April 1985 by someone called Lieutenant Hager. It provided the details of my career, and summarized the reports of an informer called IM Marlene, who claimed that the Object was socially inactive, displayed a bourgeois-liberal attitude, and showed no commitment to the working class. Furthermore, went on Lieutenant Hager, the Object was known to be regularly in contact with negative-hostile elements in the population, most notably Dr. Werner Müller, who had recently founded the so-called Working Group for Environmental Questions. In 1983, he had been contacted on the subject of Müller, but had refused to collaborate.

So far, no surprises. Next came a Plan of Action. The Object was to be kept under observation, IM Marlene was to continue her reports, other IMs would be deployed as the occasion arose, and a house search was to be undertaken. Turning the page again, I found an Observation Report on an afternoon I apparently spent in Leipzig town centre in June 1985.

14.35 hours. Girardet was taken up for observation on leaving his house on August-Bebel-Strasse. Object was wearing dark green anorak and cloth cap. Object walked up Richard-Lehmann-Strasse to Karl-Liebknecht-Strasse, waited for three and a half minutes at tram stop, and entered Number 28 tram on its arrival.

14.45 hours. Tram reached Karl-Marx-Platz. Object descended, walked down Grimmaische-Strasse, and into Thomasgasse.

14.58 hours. Object entered Cafe Concerto, opposite Thomaskirche, where a male person was awaiting him. This male person received the

codename Yellow. Object and Yellow greeted each other with a handshake. Object joined Yellow at his table and ordered coffee.

16.15 hours. Object and Yellow left the café together and separated immediately. Object crossed square into the Thomaskirche and Yellow went left in the direction of the Dittrichring.

And so on and so on. Object had listened to the organ in the Thomaskirche for a while, and then gone home. I spluttered incredulously. The supervisor looked up from her book. With difficulty, I stopped myself laughing out loud. Was it for this that the leaders of the DDR had squandered State funds, forced the citizens to breathe polluted air, refused to repair bomb damage, left the country bankrupt? Just to have on record in their files that in June 1985, Matthias Girardet had met Werner Müller for an hour in the Café Concerto and that Werner was wearing a yellow pullover and I was wearing a cloth cap?

The next report was less amusing. It dealt with the apartment search, also in the same month. Hager had found a time when both Lili and I were out, and had gone over the place with a fine toothcomb. Neither Lili nor I had noticed a thing. Hager must have put everything back exactly the way he had found it. The idea of this faceless person putting his fingers in my possessions, looking in my bed, nosing through my cupboards, made my flesh crawl. I had to get up and walk round the room for several minutes. The supervisor pretended not to notice. Hager's report noted the number of rooms, their size, their height, their furnishings and a description of what each was used for. The large number of books was recorded, as were the stacks of music, and the presence of a cello and a piano. A selection of book titles was provided. Hager had taken photos too, and I stared without recognition at rooms that I saw every day which had been rendered unidentifiable by the unknown eyes looking through the viewfinder.

And there was more to come. There were several volumes still to go. Feeling more and more queasy, I started on the reports from the informers. For several months, from June to October 1985, IM Marlene had covered the terrain on her own. Her speciality was rehearsals of the Collegium Musicum, and she had clearly been told to focus on personality conflicts and musical dissensions. Since all the names except mine had been conscientiously blacked out by the Gauck Authority, which considered

itself obliged to protect the privacy of third parties, it was difficult to tell who said what about whom, and whether it mattered.

There was an argument between Object and [name blacked out] regarding the interpretation of the Vivaldi piece, but it was resolved amicably. Later in the evening, [name blacked out] indicated that he was considering emigration, which led to a discussion with [name blacked out] who felt that it was better to stay in the DDR and attempt to change the system from within. Object intervened to halt the discussion, reminding the participants that political discussion was banned from rehearsals of the Collegium Musicum.

Marlene's subsequent reports all seemed to be much the same. I wondered who read them, and what conclusions they drew. And who was Marlene? Obviously a member of the Collegium. Was this, as I suspected, Magdalena? I leant back in my chair, passing the members mentally in review, and suddenly realized that there was something familiar about Marlene's reports. They were all neatly typed on the same typewriter, and I had seen that typeface before. In fact, I saw it regularly. It was the typewriter that the Collegium used for announcements, reminders, invitations and the like. It belonged to the Foreign Languages Institute, and the person who used it was Silke. IM Marlene was Silke. I stared at the reports disconsolately. The discovery saddened me. I had prepared myself to find evidence of treachery on the part of Magdalena, but not of Silke. Silke and I had played together for years. She was a plump, unhappy girl with whom I had once had a brief affair, and even though there had been some bad feelings when the relationship petered out, I had thought of her as a friend.

And still there was more to come. Silke couldn't be the person Fräulein Schroeder had warned me about. We weren't as close as that. I leafed through the pages until, in October 1985, I found the first report from IM Barbara. Barbara. Marlene. How did these people choose their names? A friend from primary school, an unloved aunt? My own codename - Sebastian - had been thrust upon me, but usually IMs were invited to choose their own. It was supposed to be a sign of their commitment.

It was clear at once that Barbara's contributions were far more extensive than Marlene's. Barbara submitted neither typed reports, nor handwritten notes. Instead she talked. She and her Stasi handler, cover name Dieter, met every two weeks in a safe flat on the Dresdnerstrasse. Barbara said what she had to say, and Dieter made notes, typed up a report, and put it in the file. I started to read. I realized almost immediately that I was wrong about the source. This couldn't be Magdalena. This person spent far more time with me than Magdalena ever did, and was present when I talked about things that I had never discussed with Magdalena.

IM Barbara reported that she spent an afternoon with Girardet in his flat. His aunt was also present. She explains that they discussed the Huguenot emigration from France to Germany at considerable length, and subsequently played music by Bach.

IM Barbara reported that she took a walk with Girardet to the top of the Fockelberg to admire the view over the city. Girardet pointed out lignite mines which he claimed were a source of pollution and regretted that no efforts were being made to renovate old buildings in the city centre.

IM Barbara reported that she was present at a meeting between Girardet and Dr. Werner Müller. The subjects under discussion included the policies followed by General Secretary Gorbachev in the USSR, including the recent liberation of Andrei D. Sakharov from exile in Gorky. Girardet expressed support for Gorbachev's decision and Müller concurred. Müller invited Girardet to a meeting of the Working Group for Environmental Questions to be held in his apartment on Tuesday 19 December, and Girardet declined.

I stopped reading. I remembered that meeting, and the discussion about Gorbachev. I remembered the liberation of Sakharov, and the enthusiasm with which we had greeted it. I could picture Werner and myself in the kitchen, and Werner's overflowing ashtray, and the door to the courtyard open to let out the smoke - and what else? Was Lili there? Was Lili sitting in the kitchen too, listening to us talk? No. She wasn't. I remembered clearly now. Lili wasn't in Leipzig when we heard about Sakharov. She was in Berlin, visiting a friend, and she had come back a few

days later with a detailed account of what Berlin artistic circles thought about it all. No, it wasn't Lili. In any case, I was forgetting something. Sakharov was released in December 1986, and I was married by then. Lili wasn't the only person living with me in the flat on August-Bebel-Strasse. Anne was living there too, and Anne had been present at the discussion, wearing a scarlet pullover sent from France by her sister the previous week, stirring soup on the stove... The clock was turning back, the years were falling away, and my stomach was churning. I could see her now, listening intently to our talk the way she always did, occasionally making some comment, but rarely contributing to an argument. All the better to see you, my dear; all the better to remember what you say, all the better to pass it on to my good friend Dieter on Tuesdays in the Dresdnerstrasse.

For a moment everything went black before my eyes. My heart was beating violently. The supervisor was looking at me with a worried frown. I couldn't be sure I hadn't cried out loud. I tried to collect myself. This couldn't be true, it must be a mistake. I had to go back calmly and doublecheck. I had to make sure. It must be a mistake. It must have been Magdalena, maybe it was Lili after all. It must have been anyone, anyone but her.

I went on reading. A conversation with Lili about tuning the piano, a comment about some of my students, an evaluation of one of my fellow teachers. For a moment, I paused, distracted. Had I really said that Kaulfuss was an incompetent asshole? And who on earth was Jürgen Grossman? But of course it didn't matter. I was just playing games, wasting time, putting off the moment when I had to admit the unthinkable. Slowly I turned back to the very first report of all. Discussing the Huguenots and playing Bach. Sunday walks up the Fockelberg. Well of course it was her. Who else could it be? I remembered that walk on the Fockelberg distinctly. I had taken her there on purpose, to find out what she was really doing in the DDR. A walk in the park out of reach of the microphones - or so I thought. Even the covernames: I saw it all clearly now. Why had they called me Sebastian? Because they knew of my passion for Bach, quite simply. And when she came along, they turned her into Bach's wife. Johann Sebastian and Maria Barbara. I should have guessed at once.

My eyes skimmed down the page to where Dieter evaluated her access, her reliability, and her command of the German language, which he described as 'presenting no obstacles in operational terms.' Of course it was her. She was perfectly

placed to gain entry to my life and to my mind, tunnelling into my soul and under my skin, seeing and exhuming all that went on there, and bearing it upwards into the cold light of day. In my reports on Werner, I had told them as little as possible, but she had exhibited no such reserve. She had given them all she could.

I slammed shut the file and shoved back my chair. I had to get out of there. My head was about to burst, and I had a taste of filth in my mouth.

Outside, the world was surprisingly unchanged. The traffic streamed past on the Dittrichring, the crocuses were coming out. I took great gulps of fresh air. Over to the left beyond the rooftops, I could see the spire of the Thomaskirche and I headed instinctively towards it. I was about to step off the pavement, right into the path of a sleek West German Mercedes that I had somehow failed to notice, when someone grabbed me by the sleeve and jerked me backwards.

"Matthias, you fool, what the hell do you think you're doing?"

Like a sleepwalker, I turned to face him. It was Werner, of all people, staring at me with undisguised alarm. We hadn't seen each other for months. Since he unmasked me as IM Sebastian, I had been unable to face him, and no doubt he had felt the same.

"What's going on? What's happened to you? Matthias, are you ill?"

I tried to speak and failed. How on earth had it happened that of all people I should run into Werner, my reports on whom were doubtless still lying on the table in the reading room, neatly archived in their grey-blue covers? What had I done, what had she done, what had we both done to the people we loved? Instinctively, I turned to look over my shoulder, and Werner understood at once.

"Who was it?"

6. IM BARBARA

SOPHIE

It was late by the time we got back to La Capitelle. Britannicus was waiting for us on the terrace, desperate for dinner. I gave him a generous portion of chicken and liver aux petits légumes to silence his outraged mewling, and selected a bottle of Cuvée Racine for myself and Matthias. Neither of us was hungry. I went round the kitchen and the sitting room, doing methodically what needed to be done. Now that I no longer had the road and the car to concentrate on, I needed to have something else to occupy me. I needed to put off thinking about the unthinkable just a few minutes longer. I lit the fire in the grate, I put the bottle and glasses on the coffee table. I turned off the blinking red light of the answering machine, and then decided I would unplug the phone. I closed the shutters, drew the curtains, locked the outside door. I wanted no intrusions.

Matthias had uncorked the bottle and poured the wine. He handed me a glass. We sat on opposite sides of the big stone fireplace and eyed each other. In the car driving back from Avignon, we had hardly spoken.

"Matthias," I said, "are you sure it was her? You said you didn't see her real name in your file. How can you know for certain that she was IM Barbara?"

He looked back at me without flinching. "No one else could have told them things like that."

"But how can you be sure?"

He didn't answer.

"Matthias, she couldn't have done it! I can't believe it! She would never have done such a thing!"

"I'm afraid she did."

"It must be a mistake."

"Sophie, I've just spent two weeks trying to think who else it could be. But there is no one else. No other person knew the things she told them."

"But why would she do such a thing? She wasn't trying to harm you!"

He smiled without humour. "All the IMs say that."

"But, Matthias, she loved you!"

There was a long pause. "No, Sophie, I don't think she did."

I gaped. "Of course she did!"

Another pause.

"You have no means of knowing that."

I was bewildered.

"If she didn't love you, why did she stay in Leipzig?"

"If she did love me, how could she betray me? How could she go to see her handler and tell him all those things about me? On Wednesday I went to buy underwear. On Sunday I went to see Werner. She gave me away to him, Sophie, piece by piece. How can you do that to someone you love?"

"Then it can't have been her that did it!"

"I assure you it was."

"But *why* would she do it? It wasn't as if she was a communist or something. She never paid attention to politics at all. I doubt she even knew the difference between East and West Germany. My mother said it was out of the question for her to spend a year in the West, so she went to the East instead. She didn't care either way. Anne never cared about anything except her next diploma. All she wanted was to spend some time in Germany before she started her doctorate."

"Yes, she told me that too," said Matthias.

"And you believed her?"

"Yes."

"Well, there you are! She had no political motive to inform on you."

"Sophie, politics didn't necessarily come into it."

"Why else would she have done it?"

He sighed and said nothing. I answered my own question.

"The other day, you said they offered you money. Did the Stasi pay their informers?"

"In some cases, yes."

"How much?"

"Small sums. Fifty or a hundred marks, say."

"And did Anne have any extra money you couldn't account for?"

"No, I don't believe she did."

"Then it can't have been that."

"No."

"Then what else could it have been?" By now I was almost shouting. "There isn't anything else! What other reason could there be?"

He looked at me with infinite compassion over the rim of his glass. "You don't have to have a reason, Sophie. They tricked her, that's all. They got to her right at the beginning. She'd just arrived, she didn't know what the DDR was like, she didn't know how things worked. She was vulnerable, and they saw it."

"Oh."

"Her reports started the first time she came to tea with Lili and me. She told them all about it. She'd only been in Leipzig about six weeks."

I opened my mouth, but no sound came out.

"She played the violin, you see. They saw it as a chance to slip her into the Collegium."

"To spy ...? To spy on you?"

"It seems they'd had their eye on me for some time already. I knew the wrong kind of people."

"Werner, you mean? Did it say that in your file?"

"Yes it did. And besides, I talked to Silke."

MATTHIAS

I called on Silke unannounced. She seemed overjoyed to see me. She ushered me into her tiny living room, her pride and joy, furnished to death with an imitation wood sideboard and a brown and orange three-piece suite, with cushions and pictures and vases and ornaments on every available surface. She made me coffee, offered me strudel, and chatted blithely about the weather and the West Germans. I began to wonder if I might have made a mistake.

"Well, Matthias, this is just like old times," she announced cheerfully.

It took me several seconds to realize that she was referring to our former affair, which had lasted for a couple of months at the end of 1984. I was startled into speech.

"Silke, do you have any idea why I've come to see you?"

"Well, no," she said, "how could I? It's a long time since you called round like this."

"The other day I saw my file."

"Really?" Her eyes grew round. "Oh God. How was it?"

I looked at her. Did she really not know? "You were IM Marlene. I saw your reports in my file."

"What reports? I never reported on you. Matthias," she said reproachfully, "you surely can't think I was an IM?"

"Silke, I saw your reports. They were typed on the machine we use for the Collegium. The one from the Institute of Foreign Languages."

"Lots of people use that typewriter." She went on sipping her coffee.

"Not people from the Collegium."

"But I wasn't an IM, Matthias," she said reasonably. "I didn't have a cover name. I didn't sign an Engagement."

I raised my eyebrows. "But you know what their procedure was."

"Everyone in Germany knows what their procedure was! There's been so much published in the press you can't help knowing."

I paused for a moment. "All right, then let's say you weren't an IM. But there are reports written by you in my file."

"What? Well I really can't imagine how they got in there."

I stared at her. "What did you say?"

"Well, it's true I was questioned about you, Matthias, I won't deny that. They were interested in you, of course they were, with all those dissidents you knew. I don't remember if I actually wrote a report though. I suppose I might have. Naturally, I was told not to talk about it."

"Who told you that?"

"Well, the man who talked to me."

"A Stasi officer?"

"I suppose he must have been. I only saw him once."

"But afterwards you saw someone else?"

There was a silence, and then she said reluctantly, "Yes."

I went on chewing the strudel. I didn't know what to say next. In the end, I found myself demanding, "Why did you call yourself Marlene?"

"Marlene?" She smiled to herself. "Well, the Dietrich, of course. Have you ever seen *Dishonoured*?"

I stared at her, too astonished to speak. *Dishonoured*, with Dietrich as a glamorous spy, dying stylishly for the cause? And poor, plain Silke weaving fantasies of an exciting secret life?

She saw my incredulity and scowled. "What's wrong with that?" she demanded.

I had no answer. "Why did you do it?" I asked.

"Why shouldn't I?" Her tone was faintly aggressive. "I wasn't doing anything wrong. It wasn't as if I was doing anyone any harm. It was just chatting really, odds and ends of gossip. In our society, the way it was, it was the only way to fit in. "

"Working for the Stasi?"

"Yes, Matthias, working for the Stasi. It made me feel I belonged somewhere. Do you know what happened to me when they closed the border?"

"You were separated from your parents?"

"Yes, but I don't think I told you everything. What happened was that my aunt Heike was getting engaged, and my parents had gone over into the West Zone to attend a party at the family house in Charlottenburg. Then, when they went to get the S-Bahn back to Friedrichshain, they found everything shut up. It was one o'clock in the morning. The border was closed and no trains were running. They knew right away what had happened. There'd been speculation about it for weeks. They went back to the house and sat up all night with my grandparents and Heike and her future husband discussing what they should do. My mother wanted to go back for the Markus and me, and because she had her mother in Leipzig, but my father was in two minds about it, and then *his* mother broke down at the idea of never seeing him again, and the rest of the family all urged them to stay, so in the end she gave in. The Markus and me were staying with a neighbour for the night. The Markus was ten and I was six. Admittedly, the parents didn't realize what would happen when they decided to stay in the West. They assumed we would be allowed to join them. But it didn't work that way. Since they had stayed in the West, they were guilty of Flight from the Republic, and it was out of the question to let us be brought up by enemies of the DDR. Instead we were sent to our grandmother in Leipzig, but she was getting on by then and couldn't look after us properly, so after a few months we ended up in an orphanage."

She looked at me. I didn't know what to say.

"I always felt that my parents had abandoned me. It wasn't right to leave us here. If they had cared about us, they wouldn't have left us behind. When they found out that we wouldn't be allowed to go to the West, they should have come back."

"Yes," I said.

"Ever since then, I felt that nobody wanted me. Until the Firm came along. They looked after me, they listened to me, sometimes they even solved my problems. It gave me a sense of security, all that. It made me feel I belonged somewhere. I felt that I fitted in."

My revulsion must have shown on my face. Her tone sharpened.

"Well, you wouldn't understand that, Matthias, would you? You and your aunt, and your house and your father's piano – you've always had all you wanted."

I decided to get to the point.

"Did you recruit Anne for them?"

She put down her fork. "Oh so that's what you've come for. Yes, Matthias, I did."

"Oh God." It hit me like a punch in the stomach. For a moment, I literally couldn't breathe.

Silke watched me struggle. "It wasn't hard," she said.

"But how did you- ? What did you- ?"

"I told her it was useful to have an outsider's point of view."

"Of what?"

"Of everything. The things she saw, the people she met."

"She was giving them an outsider's view of *me*?" The words were out before I realized I had said them. Silke didn't try to answer. I took a deep breath.

"Didn't she realize what she was doing?"

"Well, not at the beginning, no, how could she? Later, she must have done. By the time she signed the Engagement, she must have known. You should ask the Markus about that."

I looked at her. "Markus? Your brother Markus? What does he have to do with this?"

"He was her handler," said Silke composedly. "I introduced them one night at the Gewandhaus. I used to work with him quite often, putting him in touch with possible informers, that kind of thing."

I stared at her. I couldn't believe it. Mild-mannered, unassuming Markus who had been once or twice to our concerts? A Stasi handler? "But I thought Markus worked for the Town Hall."

"Well, yes, he used to say that sometimes."

"You mean Markus is Dieter?" The enormity of it finally hit me. The faceless man from the Dresdnerstrasse suddenly had a face, and it was one I knew.

"Richtig," said Silke. "Dieter was his cover name."

ANNE

To begin with, I thought it was just an ordinary conversation. Or rather, a series of conversations. I thought that Dieter was my friend and that we were just talking about topics that interested both of us. I didn't see him again for several weeks after the evening in the Moritzbastei, and then I happened to run into him one Saturday morning when I was shopping on the Grimmaische-Strasse. He took me off for a drink in Auerbachs Keller, a famous Leipzig restaurant, where Goethe set Faust's meeting with Mephistopheles, and asked how I was getting on. As it happened, my life had improved considerably since I had last seen him. For one thing, I had spent a lot of time talking to Silke. I can't say I particularly enjoyed her company, for she was an odd, prickly woman, full of complexes, but she explained things, and I was beginning to understand some of the things that had previously puzzled me. What was more, she had kept her word about the audition. I was due to start playing with the Collegium Musicum the following Tuesday. I had been once to tea with Matthias and his aunt, and had been invited to return the following week.

Dieter was intrigued by this. He had met Matthias, it turned out, at one of the Collegium's concerts. "It was several years ago, he won't remember me. But I thought he was an interesting person. I'd have liked to get to know him better."

"Yes," I said cautiously. "He seems like a nice man." After two meetings with Matthias, I was not yet ready to examine my own feelings towards him.

"What I can't understand," said Dieter pensively, "is why someone like him, intelligent, cultivated, with a responsible position at the university, should be content to take so little part in society. Why does he choose to spend all his time playing

music? Not that it's not a worthwhile occupation, I don't mean that, but essentially it's a private activity. Why doesn't he play a more outgoing role in the life of society?"

He looked at me as if expecting instant elucidation. I shrugged and said nothing.

"Aren't you going to tell me that it's a failure on the part of our society if some of our members choose to withdraw from it?" he demanded mockingly.

"Certainly not," I said primly. "I haven't been here long enough to pass judgements like that."

"There are a lot of people like him. Maybe you haven't noticed it yet. They concentrate on their personal concerns, they grow flowers, they go rambling, they play music, like your friend Matthias, but they contribute nothing to the collectivity. Which is a pity, because a lot of them are bright, intelligent people, and we could use their talents. But we don't have access to them. There's a whole segment of society that we've failed to mobilize, and I've never understood why." He looked at me again.

"Dieter, I've only seen him twice."

"We need to reach out to people like that. We need to make them see that we need them too. The trouble is, I have no idea how to do it."

He stared gloomily into his beer. He seemed genuinely downhearted. I was disappointed not to be able to help someone who had been kind to me.

"Well," I said dubiously, "I suppose if I... If I notice anything tomorrow, maybe I could... "

I wasn't really sure what I was suggesting - what insights was I likely to have after six weeks in the DDR? - but to my surprise he brightened immediately.

"That's a good idea. Yes, why don't you keep your eyes open. I'd be interested to know what you think of him and his aunt. Anything at all would be useful. Clearly there's something we need to change if we're going to attract people like that, but until we know what..."

"Of course I will. I'd be glad to help. If I have any ideas, I'll just tell Silke, shall I?"

He frowned a little at that. Silke? He didn't know about that. Silke was a good friend of Matthias', she knew him much better than I did, and obviously she had her own ideas about him. What worried Dieter was that she might unintentionally distort what I told her when she passed it on to him.

"It might be best if we arrange to meet somewhere and you tell me yourself. If you don't mind?" he added, smiling quizzically.

"Of course not," I said, and that was how I found myself having regular meetings with Dieter, usually about every two weeks, in parks and cafés, museums and concert halls, giving him more and more detailed information about Matthias' behaviour, habits, views and acquaintances. Dieter was interested in everything, even the most trivial information. "Even the colour of his socks?" I said jokingly. He thought about this seriously for a moment. "Why? What colour socks does he wear?"

The scientific rationale for all this was that a maximum of information was needed to build up a psychological profile of such an elusive sociological type, but this was referred to less and less often. As my affair with Matthias progressed, Dieter became my confidant, my adviser, and at times my shoulder to weep on. (But never more than that. Although not openly stated, it was tacitly understood that a sexual relationship between us was out of the question.) One night, when things seemed to be on the verge of disintegrating, he invited himself round to my flat and cooked me a meal. Some Polish speciality. He was a good cook. "Catholic food to cheer you up," he said. For the whole of that first year in Leipzig, I had two men in my life: Matthias, my lover, and Dieter, my friend.

If we had been in France, I would have introduced them and we would have spent evenings together. In Leipzig, I didn't need to be told that it was out of the question. I knew pretty well by then that there was more to Dieter than what he said, but I did not inquire further. I was beginning to learn that a good deal of what went on in the DDR remained unspoken. I was seriously enamoured of the hidden side of our relationship, the faint hint of danger, the titillating possibility that I was playing with fire. Clandestinity was a way of life with which I was familiar. I had started hiding things from my mother during my adolescence, and by now I was used to having a part of my life that no one knew about. During my late teenage years, I had become adept at concealing the existence of multiple boyfriends by claiming I was spending the night with a friend, or being driven somewhere by someone's father, or going out in a group. My mother never found out what I was really doing. At one point, she expressed concern over my apparent lack of interest in the opposite sex. I regarded the incident as a minor triumph.

These days I was playing for higher stakes than I had been used to, but that didn't worry me. Naturally, it was understood that I would not get burnt. I was a

foreigner, when all was said and done. I was invulnerable. In any case, they needed me. By telling Dieter what I thought, I could help to change East German society. Indeed, my views were already having an impact. In the beginning, when I complained about some facet of social life, he would try to justify it or explain it away, but over the course of the year, he showed a growing willingness to accept my views, and his comments occasionally showed a degree of disillusion with the social system that startled me.

Dieter was good at what he did, I'll give him that. It was months before I discovered how thoroughly I had been taken in.

About a week before I married Matthias, Dieter took me to see the Battle of Nations Monument, a bizarre construction somewhere between a pyramid and a pagoda, which had been built in 1913 to commemorate the victory of combined Prussian, Russian and Austrian forces over Napoleon one hundred years earlier. We sat on the steps of the monument and looked out over the reflecting pool. It was a grey June evening. There was no one else around.

"I'm going to miss you, Dieter," I said.

"Miss me? What do you mean?"

"Well, you know, I'm not going to have much time to spend with you after next week. But I'm really going to miss our talks."

He gave me a peculiar smile. "Then maybe we should try to continue them."

"Heavens, I won't have time. And, besides, when I move in with Matthias, he'll want to know where I'm going, and then what am I going to say?"

"I'm sure you'll think of something. Most people do."

"What do you mean?"

"Come on, Anushka, don't play games," said Dieter patiently. "You must have guessed by now."

"Guessed what? What's going on?"

"Surely you must have realized what the point of all our talks was? What do you think I've been doing with all the information you've been giving me all year?"

"All what information?"

"That you've been giving me on Matthias."

"I haven't given you any information on Matthias."

"Haven't you?"

"We talk about him, yes, but that's not information."

Dieter raised an eyebrow. "Really?"

I stared at him. My mind was doing cartwheels.

"You've been cited in my reports as a source for nearly a year."

"What!"

"I had to file your name as an informer for accounting purposes."

"My name is in your files?"

"Your cover name too."

"My cover name?"

"Everyone has a cover name. For security reasons. Usually, each IM is requested to choose their own, but in your case I'm afraid I had to do it for you."

"I didn't know," I said stupidly.

"You must have had some idea who you were talking to."

"I trusted you."

"Yes, and you were right to trust me. I haven't betrayed you, Anne. What I told you was true. We're going to change the system, we're going to make things work better, and you're helping us to do that."

"Yes, but I can't help you any more."

"When I told you your name was in our files, Anne, did you understand the significance of that? No, I thought maybe not. Your name and the information you've given me is on file at the Ministry. How do you think Matthias would react if he knew all that you've been saying over the past year?"

"You're going to tell him?"

"No, of course not. We almost never give out that kind of information. Not unless there are problems of some kind."

"So you're blackmailing me?"

"Absolutely not. I'm just trying to make you see that continuing to work with us is in everyone's best interests."

"Then what if I say no? What if I tell Matthias you tricked me into talking to you and make a clean breast of everything?"

"When he finds out what you've been telling us, I doubt he'll be pleased."

"I'll take my chances."

"Well, I can't stop you doing that," said Dieter politely. "If you think it's for the best. But before you do, there's one other thing you might want to think about."

DIETER

What you have to remember is that our country was in need of protection. The DDR was threatened by Western agents, subversives, provocateurs and terrorists. Someone had to protect it. I don't regret in the least that it was me.

My parents fled to the West when I was ten, and I grew up in an orphanage. My mother and father abandoned me, but the State looked after me. It was the State that took care of my education, made sure that my sister, who was musically talented, kept up her viola lessons, and saw to it that we both passed our Abitur. I wanted to go to university after that. I was good at science, and I wanted to study physics, but they said I should do something for the State which had already done so much for me, so I joined the Ministry for State Security. I don't regret it in the least. As a scientist, I could perhaps have helped society to advance, but as an employee of the Ministry, I was doing exactly the same thing. You might say I was a scout helping to guide society on the path of socialism.

Especially when I began working with IMs. That gave me the feeling that I was doing something really worthwhile. Working with IMs, you began to see things differently. You began to understand how society really functioned. The more prominent the person's position in society, the more you learned. I had the good fortune to work with some very interesting people, and I found it very enriching. I was particularly privileged because one of my IMs was a foreigner from the Non-Socialist Economic Area. Foreigners brought a different approach to bear on our society and its problems. Working with IM Barbara was extremely stimulating for me.

In all my time working with IMs, I never came across anyone who was collaborating with us because they had been forced to do so. That's not the way it worked. I can't deny that occasionally we came across people who refused outright to deal with us. But most of the others were happy to collaborate, because they understood that basically it was in their own best interests. In the final analysis, we were all of us dedicated to improving socialism. I know I was, and I can assure you that most of the IMs felt the same way.

During the 1980s, we used the IMs to get inside the peace groups and environmental movements that were starting up. Naturally, the IMs had to behave as if they were friends of the persons they had been assigned to. I suppose I can

understand that those concerned might have felt that they had been betrayed by their friends, but personally I don't see it like that. Objectively speaking, I believe that what the IMs did was in the interests of everyone. The whole point of socialism was that it had the best interests of the population at heart. What's more, I am convinced that the majority of the population agreed with the system.

Yes, I suppose the work carried out by the IMs might be described as spying in some quarters, but I wouldn't describe it that way myself. We were there to get a job done. Most of the people who took part in underground political activity were not overtly hostile to our system, but had merely been led astray. Obviously, we had to take energetic measures against them, but an attack on their life and health would not have been appropriate. Our view was that political opposition had to be fought with political means. Murder was not in order. The concept of operational destructive measures, that was sometimes referred to as *Zersetzung*, was developed for precisely this reason.

I have absolutely no regret for anything I did in the course of my work at the Ministry. Everything I did was designed to ensure the victory of socialism. It's perfectly simple. What's more, I reject absolutely any notion that the Ministry of State Security was the direct descendant of the Gestapo. There was no resemblance at all. For one thing, the DDR was not a capitalist society, unlike the Third Reich. For another, we had no intention of invading other countries. Our mission was protection.

ANNE

I was IM Barbara before I knew it.

I left for a month in France after the wedding, and when I came back, there were no more impromptu meetings. Instead, I was made to sign a document called a *Verpflichtungserklärung*, which meant, in their dreadful bureaucratic German, that I Acknowledged my Engagement to the Stasi. I had sold my soul to the devil. Too late, I remembered the visit to Auerbachs Keller.

For the next three years, I saw Dieter twice a month. We talked. Dieter asked questions, and occasionally took notes. I flatly refused to submit written reports, and he did not press the issue. Sometimes he made me sign the notes, and I signed as Barbara. I took care not to give information which might have compromised either

Matthias or anyone else. I avoided any mention of Werner. Instead I rambled on about inconsequential things: conversations over breakfast, disagreements at rehearsals. I talked too much, but it was purely nerves. I was frightened Dieter would suspect how much I was hiding. Those meetings in the Dresdnerstrasse terrified me. I was scared the whole time I was with him.

I got into the habit of thinking that it was someone else who went to those meetings and betrayed her husband. It was nothing to do with me, Anne, who came from Uzès and lived with Matthias and played with the Collegium and taught at the Institute. It was Barbara, not me, who sat in the Stasi's black and crimson polyester chairs and talked. On Tuesday evenings, I was somewhere else.

How else was I to live with myself?

SOPHIE

For the rest of my life I would have to live with the knowledge that my sister had informed on her own husband to the secret police. It was a dirty little secret I would rather not have known, and now I was burdened with it. My parents would not find out, but my husband would, and perhaps my children too. It would go with me everywhere. I was furious with Anne for dumping this on me. How could I ever forgive her for what she had done?

After Matthias had gone to bed, I paced up and down the living room in the dark. Granted, she was not to blame. Granted, she had been tricked. Granted, they had got to her at the very beginning. But still, my God, how could she have been so stupid! Of course, she was a total innocent. Before she went to Leipzig, she had never had to look after herself. She had always lived with my mother. Even during the three years she was at university in Montpellier, she spent most weekends at home. My mother drove her where she needed to go, sent her to the dentist for check-ups, organized her visa for East Germany. She had never had to manage her own affairs. Once when I happened to go into her room in my mother's flat in Avignon, I had been horrified by the mess. Magazines, CDs, credit card slips, pizza delivery leaflets, bank statements, class notes from her first year in secondary school, postcards people had sent her years ago were all jumbled up together. An unpaid phone bill for her apartment in Montpellier lay on top of the pile. She had no idea where to find her

checkbook. Only her current class notes were scrupulously organized in folders by subject, neatly written and clearly labelled. She was such a child. We should never have let her go. A log shifted on the fire, sparks rose, and I remembered other evenings long ago, roasting chestnuts, reading stories. I remembered hiding in the trees, falling in the swimming pool, running from the Voleur. My frightened, timid, credulous little sister.

She had started writing to me as soon as she got to Leipzig. I had never had a letter from Anne before. When the first envelope arrived, I didn't recognize the handwriting. Only the postmark told me who it was from. When I read the letter, I was shocked. The DDR was not what she expected. It was nothing like what my mother had said it would be. She couldn't cope, she hated being alone, she didn't think she would last out for the rest of the year, she was considering coming home. It had alarmed me that she sounded so depressed. And then she met Matthias. She sent me a lively account of a tea party with him and his aunt, and from then on, began to sound much better. We had kept up our correspondence, but the desperate overtones disappeared. It looked as though she had found someone to look after her. I had been relieved. I had thought there was no need to worry about her any more.

But I was wrong. It was already too late. The Stasi had already recruited her.

I groaned out loud, and Britannicus, licking his chest in front of the fire, looked up at me, surprised. Why did she let them do it, why didn't she tell us? Why did she stick it out in that awful country? Why didn't she just come home?

The answer to that, of course, was perfectly plain. Come home to what? A mother who thought the DDR was the "better" Germany, a father who didn't give a damn, and a sister who all through her childhood had slapped her and pinched her and pulled her hair and told tales on her. I began to sob, still walking up and down. I couldn't bear to think about how I had behaved. If only she had been able to talk to me, none of this would have happened. It was all my fault. If only we'd got on better. I was so nasty to her when we were young. I remembered drawing with felt pen on the dolls' clothes my mother had made her, inventing tales about the Thief to frighten her, hiding her satchel, stealing her lunch money. I recalled the time I had told her that the Thief was really the Standartenführer, who had come to haunt us and steal our souls away. He was lonely, I said, in the Kingdom of the Dead, and he wanted us there to keep him company. She had had nightmares for weeks.

I was so ashamed of myself, I cried harder and harder. In the end, I collapsed into a chair and howled with shame.

"Sophie?" said a voice behind me, and I jerked round in shock. Matthias was standing in the doorway, in his pyjamas, with his hair on end.

"I'm sorry... I didn't... Did I wake you up?"

"Sophie, what on earth's the matter?"

"I was so horrible to her, I persecuted her, it's so awful what I did, it's all my fault- "

He came and knelt beside the chair and took me in his arms.

"Sophie, it's not your fault. It's not because of you."

"But it is, it is!"

"No," said Matthias, "of course it's not." He let me weep against his chest for a while, and then he led me out of the room and took me back to bed. Not my bed, but his own. He tucked me in and got in beside me, and told me to go to sleep. To my surprise, in a fairly short time, I did. Inside the bear's cave, with the bear beside me, I was safe. With him beside me, I felt comforted.

WERNER

I used to think my country could be saved. I used to think the DDR had right on its side, and that with a little fine-tuning it could be made to resemble the ideals which I believed were present at its birth. I was wrong all along the line.

What you have to understand is how much we suffered because of the Nazis. At the end of the war, Germany was in ruins, people were homeless and starving, refugees were pouring in from the East, from Poland, Czechoslovakia, East Prussia, all the former territories of the Reich. Millions of people lost everything. Take my own family. Our home was a town just outside Breslau, which had been German for centuries. In January 1945, we had to flee westwards. The authorities waited to evacuate us until the Russians were only a few kilometres away. Hitler had forbidden anyone to leave earlier. Special radio stations had been set up, and we had to listen to them and wait for each town to be notified that the women and children could leave. If we had left without permission, we could have been shot. On January 28, we were finally told to pack and go to the station. My father had been sent to serve with an

emergency unit a few kilometres away, so my mother prepared to leave alone with four small children. My eldest brother had just turned nine.

It was bitterly cold, and the station was packed. Half the town was there. There were no trains, and the temperature was -15 C. We had to wait all night. "We were so cold," Mama told my father later, "Werner and Jens were crying because they wanted to go home to bed. How could I explain to them that we couldn't go home any more? And then the little one started to cough."

The following morning, the first train appeared. It was composed uniquely of goods wagons. The only light came from slits high up in the sides of the wagons, and the floor was deep in filth. We climbed in as best we could. My brothers were old enough to fend for themselves, but I was only five and small for my age. It was all my mother could do to keep hold of the baby and the pram with all our possessions strapped on to it. She had no hands free to hold on to me. But an older woman picked me up and kept me from being trampled and put me on to the train, and then she helped my mother with the pram. When everyone was aboard, they closed the doors and the train stayed in the station for another twelve hours. The baby's cough got worse, and she began to run a fever. It took us two days to get to Leipzig. There were air raids along the way. The train stopped and started. My mother was exhausted. The baby died two days later. Pneumonia, the doctor said.

Because of Hitler's refusal to accept defeat, we lost not just our city, our house, our possessions and our past, we also lost Elisabeth, three months old, the sister I cannot remember. My mother talked obsessively about the Flight for years. The cold, the goods wagon, the wait on the station - night after night she talked about it. I grew up with her memories. I was too young to remember the Flight myself, but listening to my mother made me think I did. We were supposed to travel further west from Leipzig, but something broke in my mother after Elisabeth died, and she elected to stay in Saxony. It was there that my father found us after the war. My mother never talked about Elisabeth: her guilt ran too deep for that. But at intervals she would remember some item of clothing or kitchen utensil that had been left behind in the house in Breslau and point out how useful it would have been, and regret bitterly that she no longer had it. Sometimes, though only when my father was out of earshot, she would even go so far as to curse the Polish good-for-nothings who were living in our house, using her best kitchen knife and her cut-glass vase, wearing her pearl necklace and her silver earrings and her good spring coat that she bought before the war. She

had never imagined we would not go back. She had hidden her jewellery and silverware from Russian looters, but the new Polish tenants would have found them in the end.

We are what we grow up with. Living from hand to mouth during those first dreadful years after the war, playing hide and seek in the bombed-out ruins of Leipzig, subsisting on a diet of swedes and potatoes, listening to my parents talk, I acquired, without really understanding it, the conviction that a state founded on the principle of anti-Fascism must be founded on justice. At school, on the radio, at night in the kitchen, I absorbed the message that the men who were going to rule us now were the ones who had fought the Nazis. They were going to raise us out of the ruins and lead us to the future. I was nine years old when the DDR was founded, and I was convinced we could not ask for more.

My father, older and more cautious, was less impressed than me with the promises of our new leaders. Still, as the pastor of a Church which Hitler had persecuted, he was ready to accord a conditional welcome to the new regime, which, in turn, was prepared to grant a special status to the Church because of its resistance to Nazism. Later, of course, things changed. The Church came under attack, and my brothers and I had a great deal of trouble gaining admission to higher education. My father lost his illusions fairly rapidly, but I managed to cling on to mine for much of my adult life. My faith in socialism never wavered, all through the building of the Wall, the suppression of travel rights, the harassment of dissidents, the imprisonment of innocent people. Even though there were abuses and injustices, it didn't mean that the basic principle was false. I thought it was possible to make changes, introduce reforms, and create a true socialist state. After the Wall came down, I was staunchly opposed to the idea of reunification with the Federal Republic. Now that the tyrants were gone, I wanted us to create our own state, a state of justice and truth.

Not until I saw the files did I finally understand the true nature of the regime. I see now that the only way for it to survive was to confront people with impossible choices, give them the option of destroying themselves or someone else, drag them down to its own level, make sure they were all as corrupt as it was. I had believed that we could live in peace and solidarity in our own redeemed Germany, but when I saw how low the citizens of the "better" Germany had sunk, I realized that I had been dreaming.

7. THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

SOPHIE

When I awoke next morning, Matthias was still asleep. I got out of bed and opened the shutters. In front of me was the old forked acacia tree, with ivy round its trunk. Through the fork, I could see a mass of yellow coronilles cascading down the hill behind the house. It had rained in the night, and the air was sharp with the scents of the garrigue. For a moment, I didn't know where I was. The bedroom I shared with Olivier was on the other side of the house, with a different view. This was the room Anne and I had slept in as children, when we stayed with Joséphine. When we were young, it was always me that woke first, and me that opened the shutters, and this was the view that I saw, and the scent that I smelled.

For a moment, I was back in childhood again. In a minute, I would wake Anne, and we would go down to the kitchen and drink hot chocolate out of blue china bowls. We would run down the hill to find Élodie, we would build a space ship in the trees, we would hunt for treasure in the garden, we would pour ourselves glasses of iced lemon tea that Joséphine kept in a yellow jug in the fridge all summer long, and at night, when the sun had gone down, we would go up to the Warming Stone at the top of the hill and lie on our backs and look at the sky. The rock would still be warm from the heat of the day, and the sky would be vast, and the stars would be like a big eye looking down on us.

Behind me, Matthias sighed and rolled over in bed, and I came back to earth. I was no longer eleven, I was thirty-six. Joséphine was dead, and so was Anne, and nothing had been the way I thought it was. Last night my childhood had been taken away from me, and I would never get it back again.

I pushed back the shutters, closed the window, and went downstairs to get breakfast.

Matthias came into the kitchen as I was laying the table.

“Good morning, Sophie. How do you feel this morning?”

I looked up to answer, but my words died on my lips, and I felt myself turning red with embarrassment. Belatedly, I became aware of all the things that could have

happened last night and had not: that theoretically still could, but that most definitely would not.

“Matthias ... I ... er...”

Last night, in the dark, it had all seemed natural. I had needed to be close to another human being, and in the absence of my husband, it had seemed normal that this should be my sister’s husband. Knowing that Anne had found security with Matthias, I had felt I could trust him with myself. By daylight, however, things were not so simple.

Matthias paid no attention to my disarray. “Did you manage to sleep?” he asked.

“Oh yes I did, I slept quite well, in fact, but I, er, that is....”

I broke off. I couldn't go on. What was he going to make of how and where I had slept? I had laid myself open to all kinds of misinterpretation.

Infidelity, for a start, was out of the question. Olivier was the rock on which I was built. I might flirt now and again with Stéphane at the Monuments Historiques in Avignon, or exchange innuendos with the neighbour down the road, but I had never strayed further than Mehemed Jaid, and I knew I never would. But did Matthias know that?

“I’m sorry it was such a shock for you last night. I’m afraid I didn’t break it very well.”

He pulled out a chair and sat down at the table.

“I’ve been wanting to tell you ever since I got here, but it was hard to find the right moment.”

“It was fine,” I said, breathing out. “Really it was. Thank you for looking after me.”

“I hope it was all right. I didn’t want to leave you on your own.”

“It was exactly right,” I said, and poured the coffee.

He took a piece of toast and looked at me. “So how *do* you feel this morning?”

“I don't know how to feel. There's so much I don't understand.”

I spread some jam on my toast. Matthias waited.

“I know you said she was tricked in the beginning, but what happened later? Didn't she realize what was going on?”

“I think she must have done.”

“Then why did she go on doing it?”

“Yes,” said Matthias, “why?”

His tone was suddenly sharper.

"What do you mean?"

"That's why I came to see you," he said. "To find out why."

"Oh. Really? But, I don't- You mean from *us*?"

"I thought one of you might know something."

I shook my head. "She never said a word about it. At least not to me."

"And not to your parents either, I imagine. That's not what I meant."

He stared down at the table.

"I wondered if she had said anything to any of you about ... me."

So that was it. I put down my coffee cup.

"Matthias, listen to me. I don't understand what Anne was doing with the Stasi, but I'm sure of one thing, and that is that she loved you."

"But she can't have- "

"When she came back just after you got married, she was so happy, so confident, so sure of herself. I never saw her like that before. It was what she wanted. I assure you, she had no doubts."

"Maybe not in the beginning- "

"No, and not later either. Matthias, think about it! She came here every year. If she didn't want to go back to the DDR, all she had to do was stay. No one was going to come after her. She was free to do what she wanted. But she went back. Every single year she went back to you, Matthias. Every summer, at the end of August, we could see her bracing herself to go. She didn't want to go, it was perfectly plain, but every year she went. Why would she have gone, if not for you?"

There was a pause.

"What if it was her job?" he said haltingly.

"Her job!"

"What if our whole marriage was a Stasi invention from start to finish?"

"That's ridiculous! It couldn't have been!"

"No," he agreed, "probably not. But you see, I can't be sure. I'd have to see her file before I knew."

My patience snapped. "Matthias, those files are not the key to eternal truth! Stop obsessing about the files and think about real life! Think about how things were with the two of you. Think about how she behaved. If she hated you, or resented you, or was bored with you, you would have seen it. Did you see that?"

He thought about it. "She was sad. I used to find her crying, and she wouldn't tell me why. I used to find her reading Racine to herself out loud. When I asked her what the matter was, she said she was homesick. So I suggested she should talk to you more often on the telephone, but of course it was so complicated back then..."

"Oh God," I said, "the phone!"

I got up and plugged it back in. Matthias paid no attention to the interruption.

"I also wondered, if she really was homesick, whether she might have informed on me as a kind of revenge for being trapped in the DDR."

"That's nonsense! Of course she didn't!"

"Sophie, there are four years of reports in that file. There has to be a reason."

I was brought up short. He was right. There had to be a reason.

"There must be something else," I said. "Something that we don't know. A piece of the jigsaw is missing."

"But if she didn't tell anyone what it was, how are we going to find out?"

We stared at each other hopelessly. We had reached a dead end. Anne had taken her secrets with her to the grave.

For a moment, neither of us spoke. And then the phone began to ring. We both jumped in alarm. Matthias glanced at me. I sat there, clutching my toast, eyes riveted on the machine.

At the seventh ring, I got up and answered it.

"At last!" said Olivier. "Where were you last night?"

"Oh, thank God, it's you!"

"Who were you expecting?"

I could hardly tell him that I had been expecting the Stasi.

"We got back late from Avignon," I said.

"I called you twice, and Alice called as well. You didn't answer our messages. We were getting worried."

"I told you," I said. "We went to see my mother."

"What did she say to upset you?"

"How did you know I'm upset?"

"Because you sound it," said Olivier patiently.

Of course, he was trained to detect things in people's voices.

"It wasn't her," I said. "It's something Matthias told me last night." I hesitated, casting a glance at Matthias, who was feigning absorption in his toast. "It's about Anne."

"Is it bad?"

"It's very bad."

"Do you want me to come home?"

I wanted to say yes. I bit it back.

"No. You don't have to do that. Don't spoil your holiday. Matthias and I are propping each other up."

Olivier thought about this. "Are you sure you'll be all right?"

"Of course I am. Go skiing. How's the snow?"

"Pretty good, actually. Is it today you're going to Anduze?"

"Oh yes, so we are." I had completely forgotten.

"And the crash site?"

"Yes."

"Shall I call you back tonight?"

"Yes please," I said.

MATTHIAS

The place where Anne had crashed her car was a lonely mountain road. With its bends and curves, the road was clearly dangerous, and by the sound of it she had been going much too fast. Sophie stopped the car beside the spot, and we got out and looked down the slope, but there was nothing to see. After all this time, the vegetation had grown back. The day was cool and misty, with a hint of rain. I could sense no echoes of that hot August day three years earlier. The site left me unmoved. It did not seem either interesting or relevant. Anne's fortuitous accident had nothing to do with our shared history. Coming here would not answer my questions, nor solve our unfinished business. I was so intent on why she had betrayed me that I could not summon much interest in how she had died.

When Sophie looked at her watch and said we should be getting back down to Anduze to see Emmanuelle, I agreed without hesitation.

ANNE

More than once, I nearly told him everything. I was on the verge of confessing several times. But something held me back. I had no idea how he would react. I didn't know how East German society looked on collaboration with the Stasi, I couldn't tell if anyone else I knew was an IM, I had no idea how widespread it was. Silke and Dieter both seemed to regard it as normal, and no one else talked about it. Not having grown up in the DDR, I had no way to evaluate it. In the DDR, you saw the world through a looking glass. Everything was reflected, nothing was real, and you ended up losing contact with normal values. You could no longer tell right from wrong, nor black from white.

Obviously I knew that, according to all the standards I had learned, telling someone else the intimate details of my life with him was wrong, but I wasn't sure how he himself would view it. He was a citizen of the DDR, he had lived there all his life - would he accept it as routine behaviour? Or would he consider that I had betrayed our relationship?

That was what terrified me.

I was scared he might simply break with me and throw me out. Anything was better than that, even the feelings of dishonesty and betrayal that grew stronger with every passing day.

I began to feel that I should have left Leipzig before we got married. When Dieter gave me his ultimatum, I should have gone straight to Matthias, told him I had to go home - and told him why. Admittedly, I tried. But I waited two days before I went to see him, thinking it through, trying vainly to find a solution. With hindsight, it was clear how I had been set up. Both Silke and Dieter had used me. My two apparently fortuitous meetings with Dieter had been no accident. Silke had known I was going to the Gewandhaus that night, and I often went shopping in town on Saturday mornings. Dieter's target was Matthias all along: Matthias, the Other-Thinker, the man who had dissident links, yet led an apparently blameless life. And Silke's target had been the man who had ended a brief affair some months before I arrived in Leipzig. Matthias had told me about that some time ago, but it had taken me until now to make the connection. Thanks to my naivety and good intentions, Silke had found a way to get her own back, and Dieter had managed to take a close look at someone he had probably had in his sights for years.

It was time to leave before I did any more damage. My face was swollen from two days of crying. I put myself to rights as best I could, and took the tram to August-Bebel-Strasse. But when I rang the bell and he opened the door, I broke down again, right there on the doorstep, at the idea of never seeing him again, and he pulled me inside and took me in his arms, and everything I had to say came out garbled. I couldn't stand this country, I wept hysterically, I couldn't stay, I couldn't get married, it wasn't fair to him.

But that was all.

I couldn't bring myself to explain about Dieter. The words wouldn't form in my brain, and my mouth wouldn't open. He held me close, and stroked my hair. With him there I felt safe, even from Dieter.

SOPHIE

Anduze was eighty kilometres from Uzès, on the edge of the Cévennes. Up here, the air was rougher and less languorous than down in the Duchy. We had left Provence behind.

My great-aunt lived in the centre of Anduze. Her house had been built in the eighteenth century, when the town had prospered with the silk industry. It stood in its courtyard, a little crumbling now, painted yellow with faded grey shutters.

Emmanuelle occupied a vast ground-floor sitting room that opened on to the courtyard. In this one room, she read and ate and slept. The rest of the house was shut up. There were bookshelves on every wall, gardening tools piled by the window, a circle of decrepit armchairs where she received her visitors, and a divan bed in one corner where she slept. The walls and bookshelves were covered with family photos, including a rather dashing one of Emmanuelle and Joséphine when they were young. There were also a few rather good paintings. Some of them had been picked up in junk shops and auction rooms, and some had been in the family for years.

I saw the surprise as soon as we entered the room. It was a picture placed face down on a pile of books. To judge from the frame, it was fairly old. I wondered what it was. An engraving of Leipzig maybe? A portrait of Goethe?

Emmanuelle saw me looking at it, but she wasn't going to be hurried. First we had to decide where to put Mehemed Jaid. In the end, we moved a still life from over

the fireplace, and hung him in its place. The portrait was bigger than its predecessor and filled the space better. The Ambassador looked perfectly at ease in his new home. There was a small landscape painting to his left, and a water-colour of Venice to his right. He sat on his horse, wearing his Turkish robes, looking thoughtfully over Emmanuelle's living room. The Ambassador, I realized, was a chameleon. He knew how to fit in everywhere. He knew what to say to please everyone. He was a man of the same cut as Markus-Dieter, who had reinvented himself as an up-and-coming manager with a West German insurance company.

When the pictures were arranged to Emmanuelle's satisfaction, she invited us to sit down. To do this, we had to dislodge the cats. There were three cats: Pyrrhus, Andromaque and Athalie. It was Emmanuelle's father who had started the family tradition of naming cats after Racinian heroes, and no one had yet dared to contravene it, though Alice complained for weeks when we acquired Britannicus.

"There we are," said Emmanuelle when everyone was finally settled. "Now, Sophie, get that picture off the table and bring it to me."

Obediently, I got up. "Don't look at it, mind! It's a surprise. Pyrrhus, get down, I told you once already. Matthias, I want you to sit here." She indicated the chair beside her. Matthias did as he was told.

Emmanuelle took the picture from me and blew off the dust. "Look," she said to Matthias, and held it so that he could see. I went to stand behind them, so that I could see too.

As surprises went, it was certainly successful.

"My God!" said Matthias.

"I don't believe it!" I said.

"Who is this?" said Matthias.

"Where did you find it?" I said.

What we were looking at was a picture of Matthias. He was disguised as a nineteenth-century gentleman in a dark coat and some kind of high-necked white shirt, but it was unmistakably him nevertheless.

"Who is this?" said Matthias again.

His eyes were riveted to the picture. His voice was midway between a croak and a whisper.

Emmanuelle pointed to the name tag at the bottom of the picture. It said, Charles Girardet, 1801.

Matthias took the portrait out of her hands.

"Who is this man?"

"At the time this was painted, he was mayor of Anduze," said Emmanuelle smugly.

"Is it authentic?" asked Matthias.

"Ask our expert," said Emmanuelle, even smugger.

"We need a rag to wipe it off a bit," I said.

"Third drawer of the kitchen cabinet. Mind you close the drawer after you, I don't want the cats getting in there."

Without its layers of dust, the likeness was even plainer. Matthias stared at it, unable to speak. I leaned over his shoulder, peering at the signature and examining the paint. For the first time that day, I forgot about Anne.

"Where did you get it?" I asked.

Emmanuelle smirked even more.

"I didn't get it anywhere, Sophie dear. It's been in this house ever since I can remember. You won't have seen it before, it's been up in the attic for years, but when I was a child, it used to hang in the front hall, next to the picture of my great-grandfather. It's one of our family portraits."

"Then does that mean that...?" My voice trailed off in surprise.

"Yes," said Emmanuelle. "I'm not sure exactly how it works but, in some way, Matthias is related to our family."

8. NIKOLAIKIRCHE

ANNE

If I could have talked to someone, it would have helped, but I had no one to confide in. Lili was old and not very well, and I didn't want to burden her with my nasty little story. Silke was out of the question, Magdalena was too wrapped up with her baby and her music, Werner would not have understood what my problem was. Once when I complained that the DDR faced its citizens with impossible choices, Werner replied austere that everyone in the DDR was free to conduct their lives according to their own moral standards. Either you lived their way, which meant you gave in to them, or else you resisted them. Christa, his wife, was just like him. There was no one else in Leipzig I knew well enough to talk to, and it was impossible to confide in anyone in France. Not Sophie, not Olivier, none of my friends, and not my parents. If you hadn't lived in the DDR, you couldn't understand. The only person I could have turned to was Matthias himself.

When I first met him, I had looked on Matthias as someone to look after me, and provide me with a respite. In a year's time, I was going to return to France and take up where I had left off. My studies, my mother, my friends. What I needed until then was an undemanding relationship with someone who would not ask for more than I was prepared to give. But, as the year wore on, despite the regime, despite the Institute, despite the myriad little annoyances of daily life, it became harder and harder to contemplate the prospect of going home.

It took me several months to understand what I really felt for Matthias. Even though our understanding, both in bed and out of it, had been unexpectedly strong from the beginning, I did not manage to get past my initial preconceptions. Perhaps because I had never had a serious relationship with a man before. Up until now, I had gone out of my way to avoid commitment. Growing up with my parents had left me with the conviction that such things were best avoided. Nor had I troubled to ask myself what I wanted out of life, other than academic success. I had chosen the path of the good student, encouraged by my mother, who was proud of my scholastic achievements, ignored by my father, who seemed not to notice them, and disdained by my sister, who expressed contempt for all my accomplishments. Sophie had spent her own school career drawing in class and smoking in the playground, and had made a

point of scraping through her baccalauréat with the lowest possible marks. Naturally, she looked down her nose at my 'mention très bien'. When I passed my degree with honours three years later, she sneered even more. I didn't care. I knew where I was going. The ivory towers of the university were within my grasp. Masters, doctorate, thesis, research: my escape route was secured. My mother in Avignon and me in Montpellier, and one hundred kilometres between us. It was all I thought I wanted.

But then, one evening at a rehearsal, when Matthias was playing and I was not, I found myself watching his hands on the strings of the cello, with their long thin musician's fingers. I saw how he held his instrument, physically encircling it. I saw how he was oblivious to everything but the passionate engagement with his cello. I couldn't take my eyes off him. At the end of the passage he had a few bars' break. He looked up from his partition but he didn't see me, even though I was standing directly in front of him. He was conscious of nothing but the music, concentrating on the oboe, waiting to come in again.

I was suddenly absurdly jealous. I wanted his full attention on no one but me. I realized that night that, contrary to what I had thought in the beginning, this was not an affair of convenience. I realized I could not go back to France and leave him behind.

From then on, it was all perfectly clear. Since Matthias could not come to France with me, I would have to stay in Germany. We would have to get married. The idea delighted me. There was nothing I wanted more. I was fairly sure that he felt the same about me. But I had made no secret of my feelings for the DDR, and I knew he would be far too scrupulous to suggest prolonging our relationship. So I decided to take the initiative myself.

What I loved most about Matthias was his boundless tolerance. I had always felt that I could tell him anything and he would understand. I trusted him implicitly, and he had never let me down. But I could not assume that his tolerance was as limitless as it seemed. Everyone had to draw the line somewhere. To put it plainly, I didn't see how he could accept what I had done. Especially when he learned how long I had been doing it. What would he do if I told him the Stasi had been part of our relationship from the start? That I had sought him out at the suggestion of the Stasi? That I had discussed him and his private life extensively with the Stasi? I used to look at him, wondering what would happen if I told him the truth. But I knew I never

would. After all he had done for me, how could I tell him that? I used to lie in bed at night with him, missing him.

The pressure grew, the need to talk increased. One day I was in the city centre, and I happened to walk past the Nikolaikirche. It was a Monday evening, about half past five. From inside the church came the sound of voices in prayer. I caught sight of a placard that said 'Nikolaikirche: Offen für Alle' and stopped short.

Open to All. I knew about the Monday evening prayer meetings from Werner, who had been going there for years. They had begun several years earlier, as prayers for peace, when the Soviets and the Americans started positioning missiles on each side of the frontier between the two Germanys. At first, they were sparsely attended, but with every year that passed, the congregation had grown. I wasn't the only one in Leipzig who had nowhere to turn. People were discovering that the Church was somewhere to go to express your feelings. It was the only place in the DDR, said Werner, where people could speak openly about their problems, learn about other people's, share their viewpoints, and feel they were not alone.

Open to All. I pushed open the door, and went in.

The Nikolaikirche was the oldest church in Leipzig. It had been founded in the twelfth century. The interior had been rebuilt in classical style at the end of the eighteenth century. Fluted white pillars reached up to the roof, and green palm fronds swept out from the pillars to cover the ceiling. With its green walls and green-and-white ceiling, it always made me think of a subterranean palm forest.

The congregation was bigger than I had expected. The church was almost full. I took a seat at the back. In front of the altar, people came forward and talked. A man in a shabby suit described how he had been sacked from his teaching job after refusing to vote in parliamentary elections. A woman in a blue dress told us how her son had asked a friend in the Federal Republic to help him leave the country, and found himself arrested for the crime of treasonous news transmission. People leant forward to listen. Murmurs of sympathy swept through the church. I was hooked immediately. These people might not have my problems, but they had others just as bad, and the root of it all was the same.

From then on, I went to the Peace Prayers every week, and every week the congregation was bigger. More and more people felt the need to talk. By then, the DDR was nearly at breaking point. It was the spring of 1989, Gorbachev had been in power for four years, and a current of reform was sweeping through Eastern Europe.

Poland had acquired a non-communist Prime Minister, free elections had been held in Hungary. Only the DDR remained the same. "Would you feel obliged to decorate your flat if your neighbour decorated his?" demanded the General Secretary, Erich Honecker. The DDR, he announced, had no need of reform. But then Hungary opened its borders with Austria, and that changed everything. After twenty-eight years, East Germans had a choice. People who had had enough of the lies of the regime could at last go somewhere else.

And so they began to leave. To begin with, they fled through Hungary into Austria; later they stormed the walls of West German embassies in Budapest, Warsaw and Prague. Honecker was too old and cut off to admit that anything was wrong. All through the summer, as the tide of emigrants swelled, he and his colleagues continued to proclaim that the economy was expanding, and life was improving. The exodus grew from a trickle to a flood. People talked of nothing else. Was it better to go, or should one stay and fight? The regime fought back the only way it knew: with repression. The police began blocking the roads leading to the Nikolaikirche during the Monday prayer meetings. They tried to pressure the Church authorities to cancel the meetings. They started to arrest the participants. When we began to hold a silent march in support of free emigration after the prayer meeting, the police sent in more men. There were scuffles in the churchyard. Werner got a black eye, and I got a bruised arm. Matthias begged me to stop going to the meetings. But I couldn't stop: I needed them too badly. And I wasn't the only one. The more dangerous it got, the more people turned out. Within a month, the number of marchers went from five hundred to ten thousand. On October 9, which was the turning point, there were seventy thousand people on the streets.

Those marches were more than an act of defiance. They were more than an attempt to force the regime to change. We marched because it was the right thing to do. By courting danger, we were wiping out years of complicity. We were proving something to ourselves. We were learning to walk upright. And if we had to risk a bullet in the back for doing this, then so be it. Maybe we deserved it.

MATTHIAS

All my life, I had slid unimpeded through the constrictions of the DDR. I had studied at university even though I came from a family of intellectuals. Lili and I had remained in the family apartment despite collective housing policies. I had led the kind of life that I would have led anywhere, in Paris or Düsseldorf or Timbuktu, with my books and my music and a few good friends. The regime and its decrees had flowed over me without sticking to me. It wasn't until I saw my file that I realized I had not been immune at all. They had merely allowed me to believe that. They had insinuated themselves into my life, they had controlled me all along. They had turned over every corner of my soul and discovered everything there was to know about me. My visit to the Haus am Runden Eck had made it clear that I was not an autonomous human being, making my own decisions, but merely an object in a file to be observed, a tool to be manipulated as they thought best.

Since my visit to Silke, I had come to doubt my own reality even further. I had started to wonder if I had ever really existed. What was this envelope of flesh that bore the label 'Matthias Girardet'? What was it exactly? Was it a living, thinking human being? Or was it a puppet with strings pulled by forces it had never bothered to recognize? That afternoon in Silke's apartment, I had begun to realize how little I had sensed, and how vulnerable I had been. The conversation had made it clear that the manipulators and the watchers were not the grey faceless men sitting behind their desks in the Haus am Runden Eck that I had always assumed them to be. Instead they were my friends and their families. They were people I knew, people I had talked to, laughed with, had meals with, people I would recognize in the street and greet in acknowledgement of the links between us, distant maybe, but concrete nonetheless. And all the time I had been unaware of the ways in which these people I hardly knew controlled my life.

When I left Silke's apartment, it was raining. The tram stop wasn't far away, but I decided to walk. I couldn't bear to be shut up in a tram with my fellow citizens. Half of Leipzig had informed, or been informed upon. If Markus, whom I hardly knew, had taken Anne from me, what might the others have done – to me, or to each other? Even Silke, with her round complacent face, eating her strudel, had had a power over me that I had never suspected. 'But I didn't do any harm,' she wailed, when I told her not to come back to the Collegium. 'It was normal, Matthias, you must know that!' I

knew it was normal: I had been an informer myself. But that didn't make it easier to stomach. It was a long way back into town, and I walked all the way. The rain fell harder and harder, but it did not clean the atmosphere. Three years after reunification, we were still breathing the fetid air of the DDR.

The next few days were something of a blur. I wasn't sure how I had spent the time. I remembered lengthy conversations with Werner, cups of coffee and glasses of wine, nights with the rain spattering against the window. I remembered mornings playing the cello, evenings listening to the organ, and whole days walking round Leipzig, going nowhere, just moving, moving, seeing fine old buildings suddenly appearing with a new coat of paint; Gap and Benetton, names I had heard from Anne, springing up in the place of dusty East German emporia; café tables emerging bravely on to the pavement. I watched West Germans striding past the sharp new stores, and East Germans eyeing the gleaming new cafés, and Ukrainians doing biznes, and skinheads looking tough, and I hoped that if I walked far enough, my body would abandon me, and my mind would close up, and the nausea heaving inside me would subside.

And then, on one of my interminable walks round the city, I found myself passing the Thomaskirche. Automatically, I went in. The Kantor was there already, waiting for me. As soon as I opened the door, I heard the organ. Someone was playing the 130th Psalm.

Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee. Lord, hear my voice. The sonorous chords fell all around me, rolling through the church. I felt better immediately. I was not alone. The DDR was not all there was. There was more to Germany than lies and traps and silence. There were people other than Silke and Dieter. Luther, long ago, had preached in this very church, and Bach had directed the choir. What I was hearing now was music that Bach himself had played, here in the Thomaskirche, more than two hundred years ago. The mysterious webs of fate that had brought the Kantor to this Saxon trade town had brought my ancestors here too, and that was why I was sitting here, listening to his music. The Edict of Nantes had been revoked in the year that Bach was born.

Let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. The organist played on. The music thundered down the aisles, demanding audience. In those magnificent notes, man was addressing God, in His own language, on an equal footing. It was for this that Jacques had abandoned everything and come to Germany. Like Bach, he was

used to speaking face to face to God. How could he have stepped aside, surrendered his Bible, and allowed the priests of Rome to take charge of his soul and his conscience? I didn't understand his faith, but I could see his logic. Sitting in the empty church, with the music unfurling around me, I realized Werner was right. I had to go to France. I could not leave things like this. I could not allow the Stasi to have the final word on what my life had been. Anne was not here to answer questions, but I had to understand her. Jacques had gone to Germany because he wanted to live in truth, and I had to go to Uzès for much the same reason.

Sitting in Emmanuelle's house in Anduze on that cool April afternoon, with the cats prowling round the table, and the roses blooming in the courtyard, I understood that my journey had reached its end. I had not discovered the truth I sought, I had not found Anne, but I had gained another truth that was even more precious. Finding that portrait had given me back myself. When I saw the picture, my head cleared, the light-headedness that had dogged me for days evaporated, and my life fell back in place. Charles looked benevolently out of his frame, and I felt myself smiling back. The likeness was amazing. His nose wasn't quite the same as mine and his face was longer; there were one or two other differences that I hadn't quite worked out yet, but still, the resemblance was unmistakable. It was unbelievably comforting to know that someone who looked so much like me had lived in Anduze two hundred years ago. It confirmed the reality of my own existence. I was not just a paper in a file. I had an existence independent of the Ministry for State Security, and an identity which went back over several hundred years.

"Your Jacques must have had a brother who stayed behind," said Emmanuelle.

"There's nothing about a brother in the family Bible."

"Well, there wouldn't be, would there? He would have been the black sheep."

"You mean he must have converted?"

"It's the only explanation. He couldn't have risen socially otherwise."

"He was really the mayor of Anduze?"

"Oh yes, there's no doubt of that. I've checked it out already."

I couldn't take my eyes off the painting. I had failed to find Jacques in Uzès, but I had stumbled across him in this remote mountain town instead. While I stared at the portrait, doing my best to memorize every feature, Sophie and Emmanuelle made plans. Or, more precisely, Emmanuelle outlined her plans, and Sophie acquiesced. I listened with half an ear. Emmanuelle had already been to the town hall in Anduze to

start tracing the links between the Coste family and the Girardets. It might take time, but she was sure we would get there in the end. Her little black eyes gleamed in anticipation. There was a very nice lady who had been very helpful in the past, who was going to see what she could do. Sophie was to continue the investigation in Uzès, and I was instructed to come back in the summer and see what they had found. Between them, they fixed everything. I was to come in August like Anne did and stay as long as I wanted. Thank you, I said, I'd like that. The only condition was that I brought Charles with me. He needed restoring, said Sophie. I nodded meekly, and then the implications of what she was saying sank in. I put the portrait down and began to stutter.

"But... I... Charles.... It's valuable. You can't *give* it me!"

"I don't have to give it you," said Emmanuelle serenely. "It's yours already. The painting has come back to its subject."

"But... I... Sophie, surely- "

"Oh there's no point in arguing with her," said Sophie.

JULIEN

When Anne came to see me, shortly before she died, I have to say I was shocked by what I heard. I had never imagined such things *existed*, far less that my daughter could have been a part of them. No doubt my distaste was a little *too* apparent. I realized later that she would not have told me about her predicament if she had not been at the end of her tether. I think she expected me to tell her what to do. But I had no solution to offer. Quite frankly, I could see no way out of her dilemma. Time solves most things, was what I think I told her. But then she was killed, and that changed my point of view.

There are things in life it's better not to see and, on the whole, I managed not to see them. I knew that I had been an inadequate father to both my daughters, and I knew I had let them down on numerous occasions. I can't say I had ever thought it mattered. The crisis, whatever it was, had always blown over. It was hard to live with the knowledge that this time it would not.

When my father died, I inherited several cabinets of fine eighteenth-century porcelain. Tournai, Meissen, Limbach, Sèvres: my father was a man of taste, and he

owned some exquisite pieces. For a long time, I succeeded in closing my eyes to the origins of the collection, and focusing only on the pieces themselves. They were things of beauty: did it *matter* where they had come from? Then one day, several years after my father's death, I found myself starting to transfer the items in the private collection to the shop for sale. I found I didn't want to keep them. Not even the rare Thuringia tea caddy or the celestial-blue Sèvres salt cellar. My father, while not quite a collaborator, had been on good terms with the Germans during the Occupation, and it was during that period that he had acquired the major part of his collection.

It was something akin to the scruples that had made me get rid of his collection that persuaded me, on Tuesday morning, to pick up the phone and dial Sophie's number. I had resolved never to discuss what Anne had told me with anyone. But now Matthias was here, the situation was not the same. I couldn't help but feel that he had the right to know.

MATTHIAS

I woke in the middle of the night to find Sophie curled up beside me, sleeping peacefully. Her presence did not surprise me. When I went up to bed, she had been talking on the phone to Olivier, but the phone at a time like this was not enough. Anne had abandoned us both: we were both of us orphans. Sophie was as bereft as I was, and possibly more.

When we got back from the Cévennes, it was still early, and neither of us was anxious to return to La Capitelle. Instead, we stopped in Uzès for a drink. Sophie parked the car on the Esplanade and we walked through the town. On the Place aux Herbes, the sun gleamed through the leaves of the plane trees and lit up the old stones of the mediaeval arches. The fountain trickled peacefully in the middle of the square. Round the corner, on Place Dampmartin, the air smelled of rosemary and cinnamon. The uneasiness I had felt on my previous visits had gone. For the first time since I arrived, I found myself revelling in the southern light and profusion, the café tables spilling over the street, the displays of basketware spread across the cobbles, the shop windows full of soaps and pottery. With Charles under my arm, and Sophie by my side, Uzès felt different. It was no longer secret and alien. I no longer felt out of place.

We found a café with a table in the sun, and ordered pastis. I was beginning to acquire a taste for it. Sophie seemed disinclined to talk, and we sat in silence over our

drinks. The old stones drowsed in the sunlight. A girl about Alice's age came out of the baker's with a baguette. She had a look of Alice about her, and of Anne too. It could have been Anne, I thought, twenty years earlier. Someone shouted a greeting, the girl's face lit up, and she waved shyly back. I watched her skip away across the square. It was all so different here from cold grey circumspect Leipzig, where people walked with lowered eyes, and gazed suspiciously around them. How could Anne have been prepared for the DDR, growing up in a place like this?

"I'm so angry with her," said Sophie abruptly. "Do you know what I was just thinking?"

"No."

She picked up her glass and took two swift gulps.

"I was thinking, I'm glad she's dead. I'm glad I don't have to face her any more."

I looked at her: she seemed on the verge of tears.

"You don't really mean that," I said.

"I don't know if I mean it or not! That's one of the reasons I'm angry with her - for making me think things like that! I'm ashamed of her, Matthias! Of her and what she did."

"She didn't do it of her own free will."

"But the fact remains, she did it! I don't know how to cope with that."

Coming to terms with what Anne had done was going to be no easier for Sophie than for me. When Olivier called later that night, they talked for a long time. He must have found the words to comfort her, for she was sleeping soundly.

I, however, could not get back to sleep. Too much had happened today. My mind wandered from Anne to Emmanuelle to Charles and on to Werner. It was time to leave Provence and go back to Leipzig. My head teemed with projects. Hang Charles on the wall of the music room. Call Werner and tell him what I had found. Start looking for a new viola player for the Collegium. Maybe even follow up on an idea I had been toying with for some time: selling Lili's flat and all its memories to a West German promoter, buying something much smaller and cheaper for myself, and investing the rest of the money in a way that would supplement my diminished revenues - and pay for my trips to France. I had barely had time to take in the fact that I was now part of a family by blood as well as by marriage, but Sophie and Emmanuelle had both taken it in their stride. They both seemed to assume that I would be making regular visits, and were already talking confidently about excursions and cello lessons and

Christmas. In all the excitement, it had occurred to neither of them to remark how strange it was that I should have been related to Anne, but that was the link I could not get out of my head. Anne and I had been meant for each other in more ways than one. But the republic of files had come between us and thrown us apart.

I wondered, not for the first time, what would have happened if Anne had been alive when I saw my file. I tried to imagine the scene. Would I have come back home from the Haus am Runden Eck and sat down with her at the kitchen table and asked if she was IM Barbara? What would she have said? Would she have confessed to not being guilty, like some of Werner's friends? Would she have denied the whole thing, like Silke? I didn't know. I couldn't picture it.

My mind wandered away again, to Charles and on to Jacques. Did Jacques look like Charles? Did I look like Jacques too? I would never know, and there was no way of finding out. All I would ever know about Jacques was that he was a Protestant - and that he was as stubborn as the rest of them. At that point I must have dozed off, because suddenly I saw Jacques quite clearly, wearing jeans and an anorak, standing in the kitchen in Leipzig. "Here I stand," he was saying. "I can do no other." I tried to see his face, and to my surprise his features were quite clear, but he looked nothing like me, he looked more like Anne, and then I saw that he *was* Anne, standing in the middle of the room, dressed to leave for the Monday demonstrations, speaking to me:

"Matthi, I have to do what's right. I have to do this."

I woke up with a start. I sat up in bed. My heart was beating faster.

The Peace Prayers! Dear God! How could I have forgotten the Peace Prayers? Every Monday at five at the Nikolaikirche, and the more armed police, the better. The more dangerous it got, the more she insisted on going. For months, I had been getting more and more alarmed. For one thing, she risked getting hurt. For another, she was not an East German citizen. They could deport her at a moment's notice. When I pointed this out, she didn't seem to care. I had never understood her determination, but now it was suddenly clear. She knew the harm she was doing, and it was driving her to despair.

"What's the matter?" came Sophie's voice sleepily from beside me.

"I remembered something."

"A piece of the jigsaw?"

"Yes, one of them. I'll tell you in the morning."

"No," she said, sounding much more alert. "Please tell me now."

Monday October 9, 1989 was a sullen grey day, and the mood reflected the weather. For a week, the *Leipziger Anzeiger* had been publishing ominous articles about the threat to order and security, accompanied by grim warnings from the Party faithful that they would defend what they had created, by force of arms if necessary. Early on Monday morning, city loudspeakers began warning the population to stay out of the Innenstadt that evening. All kinds of wild rumours were circulating: that the Army and the Stasi would be out in force, that internment camps had been set up in the countryside, that doctors and nurses had been told to stand by, that hospitals had been told to get in extra blood supplies. (Later we learned that all of them were true.) Two days earlier, there had been massive riots in Berlin during the celebrations for the DDR's fortieth anniversary. The police had responded with violence. It was clear that anything could happen. For weeks, we had been expecting them to shoot at the demonstrators in Leipzig. This time it seemed obvious that they would.

By Monday afternoon, the atmosphere was taut and oppressive. I had gone to the University as usual, but it was virtually empty. A few students huddled in the corridors. There was only one subject on everyone's lips: What would happen that night? I went home early. The service in the Nikolaikirche was due to begin at five.

When I got home at quarter-past four, I found Anne preparing to go out.

"Anne, for God's sake! Haven't you heard the loudspeakers? You can't go out tonight! They're going to shoot!"

Her face was set and closed, and she avoided my eyes. "Matthi, I have to go. If we back down now, the regime will last another thirty years. We have a chance to change things, and we have to take it now."

She had a row of objects lined up on the kitchen table. Crackers, chocolate, money, house key, and a piece of paper with a phone number written on it. She began stowing them methodically in her pockets one by one. Money and paper in her jeans, the food in her anorak.

"What's all that?" I said.

She didn't answer.

"Whose phone number is that?"

"Horst's."

"My God," I said. Horst was a lawyer. I crossed the room and took hold of her hands. "Anne, please, listen. If I asked you not to go out, for me, would you stay here?"

She looked away from me. "I can't. I can't do that. I can't not go. Please don't ask me that, Matthias."

She pulled her hands away and bent down to tighten the laces of her Reeboks - the new ones she had brought back from France that summer.

"You could get killed. There's a good chance they'll shoot."

"Don't try to stop me, Matthi. I have to do what's right. If I want to go on living with myself, I have to do this."

I didn't understand what she meant. "Why?" I asked. "What have you done that's so terrible?"

Suddenly she was very still. She swallowed. "I.... Matthias, I..." And then, just as I began to sense that she was serious, the phone rang, and she ran out into the hall to pick it up.

"Yes. Yes, I'm about to leave. I'll be at Karl-Marx-Platz in half an hour. Maybe a bit more, it depends how crowded the streets are.... No, there'll be too many people, we'll never find each other. I'll see you on the corner of Grimmaische-Strasse and St. Nicholas' churchyard."

She came back into the kitchen and looked at me defiantly. "That was Peter. I have to go."

"Then I'm coming with you," I said. "I can't let you go alone."

We went to the Innenstadt on foot. The trams were still running, but the traffic was heavy and everything was moving slowly. We were both of us too nervous to sit still. In front of the University, on Karl-Marx-Platz, demonstrators were already beginning to assemble. There was a Stasi barrier on the corner of Grimmaische-Strasse, and they were turning people away from the Nikolaikirche. Anne tried to slip through, and one of them grabbed her and thrust her back. "What do you want? Move along!"

We retreated a few steps. There was no sign of Peter. I looked at my watch. It was ten to five. The church would already be full. We decided to try and get into the courtyard from the other side. It took a long time to work our way round to the other side of the church. I had never seen so many people in the streets. "It's amazing,"

Anne kept saying. "I can't believe what's happening." Her eyes were shining. She seemed almost euphoric.

On the corner of Reichsstrasse, we bumped into Werner.

"Matthias!" he said. "It's good to see you here. Anne, the church is full. They've had it filled up with Party people since two o'clock. They're taking no chances."

We looked at each other in dismay. Above our heads, the loudspeakers crackled into life. "Bürger!" Citizens! The Stasi men tightened their grip on their guns. Werner slammed one fist into the other palm. That was it, they were going to announce a state of emergency, he said. But he was wrong. What came over the speakers was an appeal for calm from the director of the Gewandhaus Orchestra. Kurt Masur was a man with an international reputation, someone the regime needed to reckon with. Later we learned that he had spent all afternoon meeting with local officials in an attempt to avert bloodshed. What was needed, said Masur, was peaceful dialogue and an exchange of opinions. Everyone should remain calm. Violence should be avoided. When he had finished, several people applauded.

On Karl-Marx-Platz, the crowds had thickened, and the tension had soared. The service in the Nikolaikirche was not yet over, but the procession had already started to move round the Ring Road in the direction of the station. You could feel the electricity in the air. We had all seen the trucks parked in side streets, the dogs and their handlers, the grim men in uniform. No one seemed to care. Some people were shouting slogans - Wir Wollen Raus! - Wir Bleiben Hier! - Gorby! Gorby! - and somewhere ahead of us they were singing We Shall Overcome. I saw a father carrying a child on his shoulders, and his wife with a baby in a sling. There were young men with keffiyahs and earrings, and older citizens in drab raincoats and shabby anoraks. Tonight the whole population of Leipzig was out in force. More people joined the procession, trickling in from the side streets, as the prayer meetings ended, not just in the Nikolaikirche tonight, but in three other churches as well. Many of them were carrying candles. The Ring Road round the Leipzig Innenstadt was several lanes wide, and the procession filled all of them. I forgot all notion of dropping out and persuading Anne to come with me. Seeing all these people defying the authorities, emerging from their niches, standing up straight for the first time in forty years had made me as determined as anyone. We couldn't go on this way. Things had to change.

Still, as we drew near to the station, we began to fall silent. The slogans faltered. We craned our necks apprehensively. The station was a good place to send troops into action. But we got past safely. Nothing happened. The police stood passively as we wound our way past the Bahnhof, and headed on towards the Dittrichring, where Stasi headquarters were. Gorby! Gorby! we shouted. We Want To Leave! We Want To Stay! Our aspirations were fundamentally different, but it didn't matter. We were all united on one point: things had to change. Honecker's old rigid system had to go. We had to redecorate, whether he liked it or not. We had to take control of our own lives. We entered the Dittrichring and approached the Stasi building. You could feel the tension mount. I looked at the faces around me. They were grim and determined. Werner had the sombre look of a man driven by conscience. But Anne - I had to look twice at Anne! In that sober, stubborn crowd she glowed with the zeal of a *pasionaria*. She had the exalted look of a early Christian martyr. For a moment, I wondered what this demonstration meant to her. What had she been on the verge of telling me just now? And then we drew level with the Haus am Runden Eck, the hands clutching their candles locked with nerves, the slogans became more defiant, and I forgot what had happened in the kitchen. But the House on the Round Corner was dark and silent. No lights burned, no guards were visible. They stayed behind their barred windows and they watched us in the dark.

Later, we learned that there were simply too many of us for them to handle. No one had expected such a massive turnout. We were seventy thousand on the Ring that night. Faced with a crowd that big, the police had decided not to take action. It was never clear whether the decision to let us proceed peacefully had been taken in Leipzig or in Berlin - plenty of people tried to claim credit for it after the event - but Gorbachev had made one thing plain, which was that Moscow would not support military action. There would be no repeat of 1953. The East German government was on its own, to deal as best it could with the people it claimed to represent.

Wir Sind Das Volk, we chanted, as the Haus am Runden Eck receded behind us. *We Are The People*, and now you must reckon with us. The procession was entirely peaceful. *Keine Gewalt!* we cried. *No Violence!* Not a single stone was thrown, Sophie, there were no brawls, no fights, no broken shop windows. We walked round the town with our candles. You need two hands to carry a candle: one to hold it, and one to protect the flame and stop it going out. You cannot carry stones or clubs as well. There was not a single episode of violence. When a young man jumped on top

of a Trabant in front of the main fire station to get a better view, several people immediately pulled him off. (It later transpired that the car was his own.)

"We had planned everything," said a member of the Central Committee later. "We were prepared for anything. Only not for candles and prayers."

Whatever she did to me before that night, whatever she did after, I owe her a debt for the night of October 9. Without her I would not have taken part in the procession. Without her, I would not have helped to sweep away the DDR. October 9 was the day the regime collapsed. Officially, yes, the government hung on for a few more weeks. It's true that it took another month before the Wall was opened. But October 9 in Leipzig was the day we broke their will.

9. IM SEBASTIAN

ANNE

I thought that evening on the Ring had wiped out the cowardice and complicity and moral failures of the past. I thought it had put us on a cleaner higher brighter road to a country with no shadows and no fear. God help me, I even thought it had erased the files. When the Wall came down a month later, I thought it was the end of deceit and secrecy and double dealing. I thought Matthias and I could at last lead a normal life.

Over the next few months, I learned that I was wrong. Nothing had changed, and there was no way out.

After the march round Leipzig, Honecker was ousted, and the Politburo was reshuffled. Then the Wall was opened. East Germany was euphoric. People thought that at last they would have the chance to create the state they wanted. A better form of socialism. But then they began to discover what the Communist Party had done to them. Revelations of corruption and incompetence trickled out of the leaders' closed compound in Wandlitz, and Party offices throughout the country. It was worse than anyone had imagined. Stasi interference in people's lives was far more extensive than anyone had suspected. The country was shaken by a wave of shock and outrage. Stasi offices and other official buildings were stormed by indignant citizens, the Central Committee and the Politburo resigned, citizen committees were set up to organize free elections and draft a new constitution. In December, the abolition of the Stasi was announced. In January, Stasi headquarters in Berlin was stormed by an angry mob, whose outrage increased when they found half the filing cabinets empty. That was when I realized that my problem was not going to go away.

When the newly-formed citizen committees had started taking over local Stasi offices, I had been reassured. I had assumed that the files would be burnt or thrown away. It had never occurred to me that anyone would seek to preserve them. I had thought that people would be glad to see the end of it all. I was horrified when I discovered that the opposite was happening. The Stasi were trying to destroy the files and wipe out the evidence, but the citizen committees were determined to preserve the files and bring the guilty to judgement. Too many people had suffered at the hands of the Stasi for the issue to disappear. I had reckoned without the desire for retribution.

With all this going on, reunification, at first coolly received, began to look more and more attractive. Merging with West Germany was the only way to make sure that this would never happen again. One night in March when I got home, I found Matthias and Werner deep in conversation in the kitchen. Since the evening on the Ring, Werner had started coming round again like he used to do. Matthias was pleased to see him. I wasn't sure why the habit had stopped. Tonight they were arguing about the files. In Werner's view, anyone who had been spied on should have the right to go to their local Stasi office and take home their file.

"People have the right to know what was done to them."

Matthias, to my relief, was a lot more reticent.

"It's going to cause trouble. We should put the past behind us."

"We need to face the past, we can't push it aside. What is repressed and lied about always returns to haunt you. Look what happened in West Germany after the war. One generation refused to face the truth, and the next one resorted to violence to protest against them. Remember Baader-Meinhof? We don't want to spawn another generation of terrorists."

My heart sank. He was right of course. I knew what had happened in my own family.

"But when you know the truth, what happens then? How do you decide who is at fault? Some people had no choice but to cooperate."

"Nonsense," said Werner, "you always have a choice."

The debate continued to rage for a few months more. Some people thought the files should be sealed, some called for a general pardon, and some demanded that those who had found highly paid new jobs after a career running the machinery of oppression should be unmasked and punished. Chancellor Kohl wanted an amnesty, New Forum urged forgiveness. Finally, in June, a parliamentary committee was set up to deal with the files. Its chairman was Joachim Gauck, a Lutheran pastor from Rostock. Gauck took the same view as Werner. People who had been wronged should have the right to see their files.

When I heard that, I knew I was finished. Matthias still maintained that the files should be destroyed, but if he had the chance to see his own file, I guessed he would take it. I began to have nightmares about being trapped in an endless corridor with no way out. Once or twice, I woke up screaming. I could see Matthias was

concerned about me, but there was nothing I could tell him. By the time I left for France in August, I knew that sooner or later I would have to face his judgement.

MATTHIAS

One Sunday afternoon in September 1992, Werner telephoned out of the blue, and asked, with pronounced formality, if I would permit him to visit me at my apartment next Tuesday at four. I agreed at once. I didn't know what to think. The request was entirely outside our usual routine. After the Change, he and I had started seeing each other regularly again. Sometimes he arrived unannounced at August-Bebel-Strasse, or else we would meet in town. After Anne died, the frequency of our meetings increased. He made a point of inviting me to supper once or twice a month with his wife and children at their rundown little house in Gohlis, and we had also resumed our old habit of drinking coffee at the Café Concerto opposite the Thomaskirche, under the benign gaze of the statue of the Kantor in the square.

Was it to do with his file? I wondered uneasily. But the archives had been open since January. It was months since Werner had seen his file. He had been one of the first to do so. He had seemed confused rather than shocked by the experience. A large part of the file had been missing, and many of the informers had been identified only by cover names. Since the Stasi had spent several weeks at the end of 1989 destroying what they could, I had thankfully concluded that my own contribution to Werner's file must have gone through the shredder.

The bell rang promptly at four, and I went to let him in. I was startled to see him wearing a suit, with a rather threadbare tie. He stood on the threshold, and looked me in the eye.

"Sebastian," he said. It was a statement, not a question. I felt myself go rigid. Werner walked past me into the flat, and closed the door. "The Gauck Authority sent me the key to the cover names. Now I know who you all are."

I was unable to answer. That second person plural stuck in my throat. He hung his raincoat on the heavy oak coatstand by the door, as he always did, and headed down the corridor to the kitchen. He looked back over his shoulder at me. I hadn't moved. "You don't mind if we go in here? I need a cigarette."

"Yes. Please. Werner. Go ahead." The no-smoking-except-in-the-kitchen rule was Lili's, and Lili had been dead for over a year, but it had never occurred me to stop respecting it.

Werner sat down at the kitchen table and took out his cigarettes. I wasn't sure what to do. After a moment, I did what I always did. I got out a saucepan, filled it with water, and put it on to heat.

"That is correct, you were IM Sebastian?" said Werner formally.

"Yes, that is correct," I said, matching his tone.

He nodded. For a few minutes, neither of us spoke. The water began to bubble.

"I had nine IMs reporting on me," said Werner. "Five of the nine were friends. None as close as you, but still, yes, friends."

I took the box of teabags down from the shelf, and got two of Lili's priceless Meissen cups out of the cupboard. I put a teabag in each cup and poured in hot water. I took one of the cups over to the table and set it in front of Werner. "Sugar?" I said.

He looked up at me, mildly irritated. "You know I don't take sugar. In the past three weeks, six of my IMs have been to see me."

I stared at him. "To apologize?"

"No," said Werner, "to confess. Confession is a wonderful way to soothe a guilty conscience. They wait till they're sure I know about them, and then they come and tell me about it. They don't seem to see that all they're doing is unloading their burden and passing it on to me. Some of them talk for hours. Matthias, it's terrible to learn what human beings are capable of doing to each other."

I had been leaning on the stove, keeping my distance, but now I carried my cup over to the table and sat down opposite him.

"Why did you agree to see them?"

"I needed to know why they had done it."

"And why did they do it?"

Werner grinned sourly. "Two of them said they were trying to protect me. One said she was trying to protect the whole group. Two others said that, since our activities were public, there was nothing to hide. On the contrary, by revealing everything to the Stasi, they said they were contributing to the dialogue that would be normal in an open society. Nearly all of them said they believed things would change

if the Stasi knew the extent of popular dissatisfaction. They all said they were trying to do something good, and they hadn't wanted it to turn out this way."

"I see."

"What about you, Sebastian? What were you trying to achieve?"

"I don't think I was trying to achieve anything. I think I would have to say that I was trying to protect my own interests."

He looked mildly taken aback, and then he smiled. "You were always honest, Matthias, I'll say that for you."

"What use is honesty without strength?" I said morosely.

"I would say it's half the battle."

"If you've only won half the battle, then you've lost."

"At least you know you aren't winning. Was it Anne?"

My head jerked up. "How did you know?"

Werner smiled sadly. "Matthias, it was obvious. They couldn't pass up a chance like that. I guessed what would happen as soon as you told me you were going to marry her. And then when you never had time to see me any more, I knew I was right."

"I'm sorry," I said. "I wanted her too much."

"My God!" said Werner. "You wanted to get married so they turned you into an informer! What kind of monster did we create in the name of socialism? You were right to withdraw from it all, I see that now. I wish I'd had the sense to do the same."

"I'm sorry," I said again. "I shouldn't have done it."

Werner got up and went over to the window and stared out into the square. It was the end of the summer, and the grass was parched. The leaves were turning brown. After a moment, he turned to face me. He did not smile. With his stern ascetic face and upright demeanour, he bore a troubling resemblance to his father the pastor, dead these twenty years.

"Sebastian, I thank you for your apology. I believe I understand the reason for your acts, and I would like you to know that I forgive you for them."

I blinked. "You forgive me?" I had been expecting to be reviled and rebuked and cast out into the wilderness. Instead, here he was giving me absolution.

"Of course," said Werner. "Don't you think it's best?"

WERNER

Until I saw my file, I believed that everyone in the DDR had a choice. Either you cooperated with them, or you didn't. But when I found out how many people had informed on me, it changed the way I saw things. I realized I had to stop judging people. Instead, I had to try and understand them.

Out of all my informers, Matthias was the only one who had done his best to avoid them, and the only one who did not attempt to justify himself. He was also the only one to give me an apology. None of the others saw the need to do so. After all, it wasn't their fault. They had all of them been coopted against their will. The interesting thing was that none of them were lying. They all believed what they were saying. They had sanitized their memories, manoeuvred them into a place where they could deal with them. They had managed to convince themselves that they were blameless.

So where did I go from there? My wife said I should break off relations and never see any of them again. But it wasn't as simple as that. One of my IMs was the father of our son's best friend. Another was our next-door neighbour. If I had told them I wanted nothing more to do with them, they would not have understood why. They knew that they had done a bad thing, but they seemed to think that just saying so aloud was enough to wipe the slate clean. They seemed to think that they could tell me what they had done, I could tell them how hurt I was, and then we could just drink a glass of Schnaps and pick up where we left off.

After a while, I decided they were right. I had always believed that we should live in truth. But now I was coming to see that it was more easily said than done. Maybe the best we could do was to search for the facts - and then simply put them behind us. We had to forget the past. We had to forgive. Only then could we move on.

ANNE

In the end, it was my father to whom I confessed.

That summer at La Capitelle was unendurable. I had thought it would help to be away from Matthias for a while. I had thought I would see things more clearly.

But his absence only made things worse. In addition, there was Lili's health to worry about. The weather was leaden and grey and hot, and at night it was hard to sleep. I began to feel more and more isolated. I spent most of my time taking walks or drives alone. Family mealtimes were a growing strain. Sophie and Olivier both tried separately to find out what the matter was. I rebuffed both of them. I was tempted more than once to confide in Sophie - I could see she was worried about me - but the memory of our childhood was too sharp and I was afraid of her hostility. Sophie, I knew, would neither understand nor forgive. Olivier might have been a better bet, but I didn't trust him not to pass at least some of it on to Sophie, and in any case, his profession put me off. I was wary of the implications of the psychiatrist's couch. Naturally, the idea of confiding in my mother never even crossed my mind. She was incapable of grasping anyone's misfortunes but her own. That left my father.

One hot August afternoon, telling Sophie I was going to St. Maximin, I walked across the valley to Uzès, and found him alone in his flat. The windows looked over a tiny misshapen square with a plane tree in the centre. The shops were closed for lunch and the city was deserted. The streets were hot and silent. Nothing moved.

My father was sitting in the living room, behind half-closed shutters, absorbed in a guide to porcelain and a Sèvres plate. *Le Figaro* lay on the table beside the remains of his lunch. He did not seem pleased to see me.

"Papa," I said, "I don't know what to do."

His attention sharpened. Without thinking, I had used the same words as I did when I was small. *Je ne sais pas quoi faire*. When there was something wrong, when I needed help with my maths homework, or Sophie had hidden my exercise book, or the time I was accused of cheating, it was always my father I went to, never my mother. My mother, I knew, was not like other people. She had been Singled Out By Fate. I wasn't exactly sure what that meant, but I knew it was my duty to protect her. She had enough troubles of her own, without taking on mine too. My father was rarely sympathetic about my problems, regarding them all as irrevocably trivial, but he never refused to try to put things right.

"What's the matter?" he said.

"I don't know where to start," I said.

"Start at the beginning," he said.

It was our ritual dialogue from all those years ago. Hearing it gave me the confidence to go on. I started at the beginning. I told him about arriving in Leipzig,

the weeks of loneliness, the meeting with Dieter. Dieter's curiosity about Matthias, and my attempts to satisfy it. He listened without interrupting. I told him about meeting Dieter to talk about Matthias. He began to frown. Finally, I told him about the grey June evening when Dieter had given me his ultimatum and the trap had slammed shut.

By then he was looking at me as though he had never seen me in his life before, but he still said nothing. I soldiered grimly on through the Engagement, and the safe flat in the Dresdnerstrasse.

"A safe flat?" said my father incredulously.

"Yes. A special place just for meetings."

"For meetings with you?"

"Yes."

"They turned you into an informer! They made you inform on your husband!"

I had never heard those words out loud before.

"How long did this go on?"

"Until last autumn. Until the Wall came down."

"Four years! My God, Anne- " My father broke off. He was staring at me with an expression I had never seen.

"I told you. I had no choice. They forced me into it."

"So you say. Does Matthias know?"

"No. I've never dared to tell him."

For a moment, he was silent. Then he gestured towards the newspaper on the table. "It looks as though German reunification isn't far away. Maybe it won't matter."

"It won't make any difference. They're making arrangements for people to see their files."

"Will Matthias see his?"

"I think so, yes."

"Then you'll have to tell him first."

"Papa, I can't. I'm scared to."

"You owe it to him. You must."

"I can't. I've tried. I can't."

"What exactly are you scared of?"

"I'm frightened he'll tell me to leave. He won't want to live with me any more."

"Has he ever hinted at this? Are you sure that's what he'd do?"

"No, he hasn't. But I don't see how he could do otherwise. And even if he didn't, can you imagine...? How could we...?"

From the flicker in his eyes, I could see he agreed. There was a long silence. At last he said, "I'm sorry, Anne. I don't know what to say."

"What am I going to do?"

"Quite honestly," said my father, "I don't see what you can do. How long will it be until he sees the file?"

"I don't know exactly. Maybe several years."

"As much as that? Then maybe you'll find a solution."

He pushed his chair back from the table, and fixed his eyes on his Sèvres plate.

There was a long tradition of flight in my family. My great-grandmother had run away from East Prussia. My grandfather had run away from Auschwitz. My mother had run away from her family and her country. Her husband and children had run away from her. No one ever stayed to fight, confront their problems, try and make things better. My father was the only member of my family who had faced up to adversity instead of running away from it. But my predicament, apparently, was too much even for him.

After a long pause during which neither of us spoke, he looked at his watch, and said it was time to get back to the shop. He had a client coming. When I left, he neither touched me nor embraced me, and he couldn't meet my eyes.

10. LE PONT DES ABARINES

SOPHIE

The path up the hill was edged with low stone walls, and overrun with coronilles and thyme. Nothing much had changed since Racine took this road three hundred years earlier, on his way to Uzès from his uncle's house in St. Maximin. The flowers still spilled over the path in a flood of yellow, and the sky was the same brilliant blue that he had known. I could imagine him on the path before me, with his pale serious face and sombre clothes. When he came to stay with his uncle, Canon Sconin, Racine was twenty-two and already a budding poet. He had come to Uzès in the hope of obtaining a living in the church, but the project fell flat and he returned to Paris after a few months.

The church, in any case, was not what he was thinking about as he picked his way through the garrigue in the spring sunlight. He had stayed with his uncle for less than a year, but when he came to write his play *Iphigénie* twelve years later, he remembered the spring flowers on the path to Uzès.

*Et moi, qui l'amenai triomphante, adorée,
Je m'en retournerai seule et désespérée!
Je verrai les chemins encor tout parfumés
Des fleurs dont sous ses pas on les avait semés!*

At least that was Anne's theory. As I walked up the hill in Racine's footsteps, Anne was stepping light-footed beside me in her usual way, pointing out the flowers, reciting the lines. *I brought her here triumphant and adored/ I will return alone and in despair/Seeing the roads still full of the sweet scent/Of flowers that were strewn beneath her feet.* I wasn't sure if I was glad of her company or not. My sister had been deceiving me for years, not just while she was married to Matthias, but long before that. I remembered what Olivier had always said about her. I remembered things I had never wished to see. Anne had not been what she seemed. She had known things she hadn't told me, she had let me believe things that weren't true. She had been capable of acts I would never have imagined, even if, as Matthias seemed to think, she had atoned for them later. She had deceived me, and, worse than that, she

had brought me face to face with myself. My other self, myself as I could have been. If I had been in her place, what would I have done? Would I have betrayed Olivier as she had betrayed Matthias? For the first time in my life, I was beginning to understand how my mother must have felt when she found out what the Standartenführer had done to her grandfather.

At the top of the hill, the trees grew thinner and the path opened out on to a flat expanse of rock. When we were young, we had called it the Pierre Qui Chauffe. On warm summer nights, we had lain here to look at the stars. As I walked forward, the city rose before me on the hill across the valley. First a low row of ochre houses, with cypresses standing like sentinels in front of them, and then, over to the right, the real sentinels, the towers of Uzès, left over from its warrior past: the Tour Fenestrelle, the Sainte Perrine, the Vierge Noire. I had been coming here all my life. But today it all looked strange. Forgive her, said Matthias, but I didn't think I could. For that, I would first have to forgive myself.

I was starting to shiver on the Warming Stone. The wind had freshened, and it looked like rain. I walked back down Racine's Way to La Capitelle.

As I reached the house, the phone began to ring. It was my father. He had been trying, he said querulously, to get hold of me for days. I could at least switch on the answering machine when I went out.

"I need to speak to Matthias at once."

"Matthias isn't here, Papa."

There was a silence. "He hasn't gone back to Leipzig, has he?"

"No, he's leaving tomorrow."

"Where is he now?"

"He's gone to St. Maximin to play for Anne."

"For Anne? In the cemetery? On his cello?"

"Do you want me to tell him to phone you when he gets back?"

"No, don't bother. I'll try and catch him there."

He hung up. I stared at the receiver. What was he so alarmed about? What was so urgent?

Remembering the answering machine, I switched it back on. Immediately, the messages started to play.

Six people had called while we were in Avignon on Monday. A lady with a picture to restore, who said she had been given my number by Coste Antiquités.

Isabelle, my sister-in-law, with a query about the ski trip. Olivier saying they had arrived safely. Gérard with a problem to do with the theatre workshop. Olivier again, sounding annoyed. And then, right at the end, I heard Alice's voice.

MATTHIAS

I had not planned what I was going to play before I got to the cemetery, but when I sat down on my usual vault, what came naturally to my fingers was the Air on a G-string. The piece was not at its best when played on a cello alone, but still, it seemed most fitting. The ship on the deep black sea, sailing towards its fate. I knew she would understand. Maybe she would even remember, if such things were possible where she was now.

The final chords died away. The shutters above me stayed closed. I stared at the grave and tried to pierce its secrets. Why did you do it? Why did you never tell me?

Footsteps sounded on the gravel, and I looked up to see Julien approaching. With a cashmere overcoat thrown over his shoulders, and a spray of white roses in his hand, he cut an incongruously elegant figure in that country graveyard.

He came to a halt on the opposite side of the grave, and we looked at each other. I realized at once that he was different today. He had a purposeful air that I hadn't seen before. The languid antique-shop persona had disappeared. I was suddenly afraid. I got to my feet.

"I'm glad you're here," he said. "I have something to tell you."

I eyed him warily. "Yes?"

"I assume you came because you saw your file?"

"I- Yes. How did you-?"

"Anne came to see me just before she died."

"She told you about the *file*?"

"She told me what had happened."

"She told you she *informed* on me?"

"She said they forced her into it."

I sighed. "They couldn't force her. They could force some people, but not her. She was a foreigner. She could leave whenever she wanted."

He looked at me dryly. "But she didn't want to leave. She wanted to stay. That was the problem."

"What?"

"They gave her an ultimatum. Just before you got married. Either she continued to work with them, or they would cancel her residence permit."

I stared at him, dumbstruck. He spelled it out for me.

"They would have made her leave the country. Without any hope of returning."

I could not speak.

"She would never have seen you again."

I sat down abruptly on the nearby vault. It was so obvious. It had never crossed my mind. It had never occurred to me that they might have used the same threat twice: once on the husband, and once on the wife.

I tried to speak. My voice came out as a croak.

"Her residence permit? That was what she said?"

"Yes. It was perfectly clear. When she came to me she was very upset. She was scared to tell you about it, but she knew you would find out when you saw your file, and then she thought you would leave her."

"She thought I would...?"

I had to turn away. Julien waited patiently, adjusting his coat.

"Oh God, if only I'd known. If only she'd told me. In all that time, why did she never tell me?"

"I believe she was too ashamed."

"But I- "

"She was afraid you would think she didn't love you. But she did. She- "

He broke off. We looked at each other. With an effort, I pulled myself together.

"Thank you for telling me. I'm very grateful."

He nodded and stepped forward to the grave. He stooped to place the flowers by the headstone, and retrieved the withered bouquet lying there. "I'm the only one who brings her flowers. Sophie never seems to think of it."

"I didn't think of it either."

"But you played for her." On the verge of moving away, with the dead flowers in his hand, he turned back to me.

"When she was small, she used to come to me with problems she couldn't solve on her own. The kind she couldn't hide from. I think she thought I might help her with this too. But I couldn't. I didn't know what to say. I failed her, Matthias, I failed her miserably. And then she was killed...."

He shuffled away from the grave, leaving me there.

SOPHIE

When Matthias got back, I was waiting on the terrace. I had put the violin case on the table beside me. I had taken it from Anne's room after she was killed, but I had never thought to open it. I just wanted to put it somewhere out of sight.

He came round the corner of the house with the cello over his shoulder, and stopped when he saw me sitting there. No doubt I was looking strange.

"Sophie! Is something wrong? I just saw your father in the cemetery." He noticed the violin case, and broke off. "Why, that's Anne's, isn't it?"

"Yes. There's something inside it." I had gone in search of the violin as soon as I heard the message. Just as Alice had said, the letter was there. I opened the case, felt under the violin and took out the envelope. It was very bulky. God knows what she had put in there. I had been sitting there for an hour, too scared to think about it.

"Here. It's addressed to you." I held it out.

Für Matthias, said the inscription. It was Anne's writing, no doubt about that: I had recognized it immediately. She would have expected Matthias to come to the funeral, open the case and find the note. Three years ago.

Matthias stared at it, perplexed.

"I saw your father and he told me..." His voice trailed off.

"Alice found it the other day. I heard her message on the answering machine just now."

He took it uneasily and slit it open. Inside the envelope were several sheets of paper folded together, and a single sheet folded separately. He glanced cursorily at the bigger package and put it down on the table. Then he began to read the single sheet. Both sides of the paper were covered with Anne's small angular writing. It took him a long time to read. His face grew paler and paler. He read it once to the end, and

then through a second time. I waited for him to finish. My stupid, fragile, frightened little sister. What had she done? What in God's name had she done?

At last Matthias looked up. He could hardly speak.

"The accident," he said. "What did the police say? When the car went off the road? Are they sure it was an accident?"

ANNE

Matthias, my beloved.

If I could, I would have told you this in person. God knows, I tried. But the words wouldn't come. It's not easy to write this letter either. I don't know if I will ever give it you. Maybe it will turn out to be just a dress rehearsal. Maybe when you get here, we'll take a walk in the garrigue and I'll tell you everything. But somehow I don't think that's going to happen. I'm beginning to doubt that I will ever see you again.

It has taken me half an hour since writing those words to pick up the pen again. The idea of never seeing you again is more than I can stand. Once I started crying, I couldn't stop. I kept the pillow over my head to muffle the sound. It's two o'clock in the morning, and they're all asleep. Oh God, Matthias, what is to become of us? I've been listening to the *Air on a G-string* over and over again to give me courage.

What have I done to us?

Well, when they open the files, you'll find out what I did, and once you know that, I don't think I can ever look you in the face again. I never really saw it through your eyes before, but now that I have done, I want to shrivel up with shame. I don't know how I could have done it, Matthias, I don't know how I could have sat in that room week after week and told Dieter all those things about you, about us. I just don't know. I disgust myself. I can hardly bear to touch myself, and I don't want anyone else to touch me either. Not even you. Especially you. I cannot stand to walk around in my skin, thinking my thoughts.

In the beginning, when the Wall came down, and I began to see clearly at last, I thought there might be some way I could atone for what I did, but I was deceiving myself. Going out and washing people's feet like they did in the Middle Ages might make *me* feel better, but it won't help *you*. I can do nothing to help you, and that's what makes me feel so awful. It's there forever, it can never be wiped out, and that's

the only thing I really want. If only I could go back in time to the moment before I met Dieter. But if I hadn't met Dieter, I wouldn't have met you. You'll see how it happened. I've written everything down for you.

I can't even apologize, I can't even ask for your forgiveness. What I did is too terrible for that. Maybe I could say I was sorry, and maybe you could say you forgave me, but it would still be there in our hearts. How could we go on living together, day in, day out, with that hanging over our heads? Do you understand now why I didn't want children? How could I tell them one day what their mother had done?

I've been sitting here all summer under the Judas tree in Sophie's garden thinking, and I can see no way out. Do you remember the day we went to Auschwitz, when we talked about my grandfather on the way home? I think he took the only way out, Judas' solution, the only honourable exit, and perhaps the only practical one too. I still don't understand why he waited so long. I can only think that maybe it was his form of atonement: to go on living for fifteen years and to think about Auschwitz every day. But I can't wait that long: I don't have his courage. That's part of it. The other part is that he could do nothing to make amends to his victims, whereas I can.

If only I had known what was in store for me that day I came to tea and played the violin for you and Lili. I'm so sorry Matthias.

MATTHIAS

In the spring of 1987, we borrowed Werner's car and drove to Krakow. It was the first time we had travelled anywhere together, apart from day trips to Weimar and Erfurt, and the trip was a kind of delayed honeymoon. Poland was one of the few destinations that DDR citizens were allowed to go to without asking permission. Magdalena had friends in Krakow, and we were to stay with them.

As soon as we crossed the border, we could see that we were in another country. The DDR border guards looked us over with no expression whatsoever. We aroused no reaction, either good or bad. But their Polish counterparts grinned with contempt at the sight of my light blue DDR passport, smiled curiously at Anne's dark blue French one, and examined us both with interest. A few yards further on, the money changers, sharp young men in denim jackets, awaited our arrival in full view of

the border guards. We were barely fifty yards out of the DDR, and the air smelled already of anarchy and adventure.

The first night, we stayed in Wroclaw, which had once been Breslau, in a cheap hotel on the outskirts of town. We were dazzled by the bright colours of the buildings on the central square, and the smile of the waitress who served our beers. We sat at an outdoor café and watched the crowds. The sky was higher than in the DDR, and the atmosphere was lighter. The way people walked was different, and so was the look in their eyes. Unlike the hunched and gloomy East Germans, the people here were relaxed and smiling. They looked as though they were enjoying themselves. Theoretically, they lived in the same conditions as we did, they were underlings, just like us. But they had a dignity that we lacked, and a confidence we had had squeezed out of us. In Poland, it felt as though communism was a temporary inconvenience, not a way of life.

On the way back to the car, we walked past the Hotel Monopol, where Hitler had stayed on his visits to Silesia, and admired the balcony from which he had addressed the populace. Without him, it would still be Breslau here, the face of Eastern Europe would be different, and Werner and his family would still be living in their sprawling old house in the suburbs next to the church.

Krakow seemed even more exotic to our dulled East German senses. There was something oriental about the shape of the arcades of the Cloth Market, and the inside of St. Mary's Church shimmered with blue ceiling vaults, ochre arches, and an unmistakable aroma of Orthodoxy. We had reached the crossroads of Europe, the boundary of East and West, the place where Germans and Slavs and Turks all blurred into one. In Krakow, there were galleries showing paintings from Italy and Mexico, bookshops jammed with items that were on the Index at home, cafés with fake gas lamps and green baize tablecloths and a faint air of Austro-Hungary, junk shops whose wares ranged from American flags and helmets with swastikas to the lost, mismatched porcelain of the old Prussian aristocracy. True, it was dirtier than Leipzig, the smell of burnt grease floated on the air, drunks littered the pavement in the early morning - but it was alive. Poland breathed, it throbbed, it moved. You could feel an energy that was entirely missing at home.

Magdalena's friends lived in a tiny flat near the old Jewish Quarter. Tadeusz was a technician at the state-owned radio station, and Danuta worked in an art gallery. They lived in a way that we in the DDR could only dream of. Tadeusz spoke five

languages and owned a huge collection of jazz records. Danuta had relatives in Canada and spoke to them regularly on the phone. They had been to Paris and Toronto and were saving up for a trip to New York. They took us to galleries and jazz clubs, they showed us the best places to buy banned books. They introduced us to a woman whose family spoke French at home, and a man who offered to get me a false passport so that we could leave immediately for Sweden. One night, they took us to a Jewish restaurant not far from their house, where there was a band playing klezmer. I had never heard anything like it before. There were three of them, two men and a woman: a serious blond accordionist, a dandified double-bass player with a pony tail and waistcoat, and a clarinetist whose solemn schoolgirl air abruptly gave way to a series of wild, unexpected trills. It was like stepping into a new world. I had never been interested in music other than classical. I had been content to play Bach all my life, and I had thought it was enough, but it suddenly seemed as though I had been hiding behind a wall, afraid to come out. Bach gave me a deep intellectual satisfaction, but his music had never made me feel alive like this music did.

The next day we went to Auschwitz. The Krakow Jewish community had shrunk from 70,000 before the war to around 150 now. The camp was an hour's drive from Krakow. The road ran past houses and orchards. We saw children's playthings lying on the grass, a railway bridge crossing a stream. Anne eyed the bridge nervously, but said nothing. I could guess what she was thinking. We had all seen pictures of that sinister one-track railway line with the guard tower looming over it. She had been getting gradually tenser ever since we left Krakow. She had a personal interest in this place. We had told our hosts we were coming here today, but we hadn't told them why.

Auschwitz felt like the worst place on earth. Around thirty of the former barracks still survived. They were built of brick and, from the outside, resembled nothing so much as ordinary, two-storey apartment buildings. In places, one could almost imagine oneself on a normal suburban street. Tour guides in neat grey suits shepherded groups of visitors from block to block and explained the workings of annihilation. This is Assembly Square, where roll-calls were held, and executions performed on a portable gallows. This is Death Wall, where prisoners were shot. This is the building where prisoners' personal effects are kept. Nobody spoke. We avoided each other's eyes. We walked in silence past prayer shawls, toothbrushes, shaving brushes, suitcases. We gazed on mountains of hair, and mounds of spectacles.

In the death block, we encountered a group of American teenagers, stunned and white-faced, many of them weeping. I took Anne's hand, and she clutched at it desperately. This way please, ladies and gentlemen, for the crematorium and the gas chamber. I wondered how the guides could work at a job like that. How could they say such things day after day after day? What were their lives like? How did they raise their children? The air was growing more and more oppressive. In the area of the crematorium there was an odd smell of burning. I didn't know if I was imagining it or not. Was it possible that a smell could still linger in the air after fifty years?

Driving away, we were both silent. After a few miles, Anne said, "Do you know what it was he saw?"

I glanced at her, puzzled. "No, how could I? Do you know?"

She shook her head sadly. "No. I thought I would when I came here. I thought I would understand what it was he saw. The thing that made him go back to the front."

"It might not have been just one experience. It was probably seeing the whole place, and understanding what it was for, and how it functioned."

"I suppose so, yes. I hadn't thought of that."

"He had seen some pretty nasty things in Poland already. He must have realized that this was where it was all leading. This was what he had been fighting for all these years. The summum of the National Socialist experience."

"What I don't understand is why he didn't kill himself there and then. Why did it take him fifteen years to repent?"

"Do you think he did repent?"

"Of course he did. Why else would he have hanged himself?"

"I suppose he felt he couldn't live with it any more."

"Exactly. That's what I mean by repentance."

I glanced at her doubtfully. "Repentance for you means sacrificing your own life?"

"For crimes like his, I don't see what else there is. I don't see what other kind of sacrifice you can make."

"Yes, but, Anne- "

"What else can you do? It's not enough just to say you're sorry. What's that going to change? And in any case, how can you show you mean it. No one can read in other people's hearts."

"By saying you're sorry, you acknowledge what you've done, and you recognize that you were wrong to do it."

"Yes, but it's not enough. Not for the victim, and not for the person who committed the crime. I think it was probably easier for Albert Speer, who spent twenty years in prison, to live with himself than it was for my grandfather. Society declined to punish him, and in the end I think he had to punish himself."

EPILOGUE

ANNE

Uzès, August 1990

When I take Sophie's car and say I just need to pop into Avignon, it doesn't feel as though I'm never coming back. I don't feel the need to say goodbye to Sophie, nor to the children. I don't sense any pangs of loss as I drive out of La Capitelle and take the road down the hill past the Thief's House. What I'm doing is in the nature of Russian roulette. Either I will, or I won't.

I know the place from several years ago. The grandparents of one of my schoolfriends used to live just round the corner. They were always telling us not to go too fast on our bikes down the hill. One day when we went to visit them, we found them nervous and shaky. A motorist had gone into the ravine the day before. He had been killed instantly. Bikes were out of the question that day, but after lunch we all walked down the road to the place where it happened and looked down with awe at the shattered undergrowth and ripped-out saplings. My schoolfriend shivered, the grandparents crossed themselves, and I, apparently, filed the information away for future reference.

It takes me over an hour to get there. Right through Anduze and past St. Jean du Gard. But as I drive, my resolve, instead of weakening, grows firmer. My mind is focused and serene. My heart is lighter. This is the right thing to do. For my grandfather, my father, for Matthias, and for myself.

Past St. Jean, the road rises steeply into the Cevennes. I'm nearly there. Past the grandparents' old house, round the last bend, accelerating slightly. The road curves sharply to the left. I drive straight ahead. My hands on the wheel don't falter, my foot stays pressed to the accelerator. The sun is high overhead, the air is pure and clean, and I'm sailing out into emptiness. There is nothing tying me down to life. At last, I'm not dirty any more. I'm free. I'm flying.

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The expression "IM Judas" was purloined from a text by Wolf Biermann.

