

Bach's Lunch



Bach's Lunch by Ward Wagher

1

It was a pleasant summer morning in Leipzig, and the cantor left home early. He had a cantata to perform on Sunday as usual, and he was late in copying the scores for the musicians and singers. After a pleasant breakfast with his wife, and a time in the Scriptures, he walked the short distance to the St. Thomas' Church. The dew was heavy this morning, and he stepped carefully – the cobblestones could be slippery. As he walked, he whistled the tune of a new fugue he was thinking about.

He completed the short melody and contemplated the overall pattern of the piece. He had just begun humming the tune again, and despite his care, he felt his feet slip out from under him. He reached behind himself to try to break the fall, and during that time, things changed. He landed solidly on his behind, but the day had turned to darkest night in an eye-blink. It was raining now, and it was cold. He was sprawled, not on cobblestones, but on a hard, abrasive surface.

He looked around wildly, his breath rasping through his clenched teeth. He held his hand to his face and saw a slight shadow. Thank God he wasn't blind. Looking in the other direction, he could see woods in the distance with some kind of lighting behind the trees. Too regular to be a fire, he wondered if he was seeing a second sunrise. Where was he, and what had just happened?

From the distance came a hissing sound, and he turned his head to look in that direction. There was a slight hill, and he saw increasing light behind it. He was a sensible, civilized German and didn't believe in dragons, but with a louder hiss, two brilliant eyes swept over the top of the hill and drew closer. He climbed to his feet but remained frozen as his pulse pounded in his ears.

The creature grew closer, and the hiss turned to a growl. Okay, so maybe it wasn't a dragon, but he didn't know what it was, and he was frightened. He spun around to run and slipped again. Lying on the ground, he spun around to face whatever was getting ready to fall upon him, and... it wasn't a beast. It was a carriage of some sort. But where were the draft animals?

The carriage turned sideways and skidded to a stop. Two people stepped from the carriage and trotted over to him.

“What are you doing here? Are you all right, Sir?”

„Wo bin ich?“ (*Where am I?*)

“What did he say?”

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„Wer sind Sie?“ (*Who are you?*)

“I do not understand.” The speaker turned to the other. “Do you recognize the language?”

The other speaker was a woman – the voice was a melodic soprano. A singer's voice.

“Are you hurt, Sir?” the woman asked.

„Ich verstehe wirklich nicht was Sie sagen.“ (*I really do not understand what you are saying.*)

The woman turned to the man. “Edgar has gone and done it, Quint.”

“What?”

“Look at this man,” she said. “Look at the odd clothes. And he's definitely not dressed for the weather. Ed has activated the quantum tunneling machine.”

The man stood with his hands on his hips. “I am going to kill him.”

“That will wait, Quint. We need to help this poor man. When the time comes, I will help you kill Ed Forsenn.”

They grabbed the German by the arms and helped him to his feet. “Come on, Sir, we need to get you warmed up.”

„Ich kann Sie nicht verstehen.“ (I cannot understand.)

“I wish I knew what he was saying,” the woman said.

“We should take him up to the lab, Sally. That is about the closest place. We can talk to Ed, then.”

He followed the couple as they helped him to the carriage. It was most unusual. The sides were highly lacquered, and the carriage lamps were *bright*. They didn't flicker. No, this was not a dragon. It was clearly an artifice of some kind.

With a click, the woman pulled the door open.

“Sit in the back with him, Quint. I'll drive.”

It sounded like English to him, but not quite like how the Englanders spoke. He had a good ear for languages. In addition to his *Deutsch*, he knew Latin well and had a slight acquaintance with French and English. His head was spinning, though. Everything was different. What had happened?

The seat in the carriage was fabric. It was obviously a very sturdy fabric, but the weave had no decoration. A lamp was above him and shown down. It did not flicker. The door clicked shut, and the man trotted to the other door and climbed in. Ahead of him, the woman climbed into the carriage. This was odd. The seats did not face each other. The woman busied herself with something he couldn't identify, and the carriage began moving.

There was no noisy rattle of wooden wheels across cobblestones. The carriage moved smoothly, with a quiet hum. He saw the woman turning a wheel in front of her, and it seemed to him that she was using it like a tiller on a canal boat. When she turned the wheel, the direction of the carriage changed. What a marvelous device. The wonder almost made him forget his terror.

He turned to the man sitting next to him. „Wo sind die Pferde?“ (*Where are the horses?*)

The man gave him a blank look and just shook his head.

„Wo bringen Sie mich hin?“ (*Where are you taking me?*)

“I am sorry, friend, but I have no idea what you are saying. I wish you could understand me.”

“Ed Forsenn is going to have a lot to answer for,” Sally said. “I cannot believe he activated the machine after you warned him to wait.”

“He was not being malicious, Darling.”

“I know,” she replied. “As usual, he was being an idiot. And we have this poor man, who is now our guest.”

“Talk about a can of worms.”

„Worms? Bin ich in der Stadt Worms?“ (*Worms? Am I in the city of Worms?*)

Quint looked at the unintended guest and raised his hands in frustration.

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The carriage moved along the road at an insane pace. It was as if the horses were pelting at full speed. Nobody drove their horses that hard. But, of course, there were no horses attached to this carriage. The German had seen millers and sawyers manage their shops with water wheels, but he could not see what propelled this device. He studied the interior of the carriage. It was dark, but there was enough ambient light for him to see some of the details. The artistry was executed perfectly but devoid of ornamentation. And in front of the woman were a series of what looked like clock faces and even had numbers on them, but he could not ascertain their purpose. And they glowed – an unearthly eldritch glow like foxfire or fairey lights.

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He could not think of the woman as other than the coachman, even though there were no horses to drive. She guided the carriage along the road, and they rolled up to a gate set in a tall fence. As the carriage slowed, the gate slid open of its own accord. Another marvelous sight.

„Vorsicht!“ he muttered, shaking his head.

The woman guided the carriage through the gate and accelerated again. The German turned around in his seat to look out the back window of the carriage to see the gate sliding closed again. He turned to the side window and studied it. He raised an arm and tapped on the window with the back of his hand. The ring on his fourth finger rang sharply against the glass.

„Krystall? Was ist los?“ (*Glass? What is this?*)

„That's glass,” the man said.

The German shook his head. Window glass, as he was familiar with, was formed in small diamond-shaped pieces and set into ornate window frames. Even then, the glass was wavy and somewhat murky. This was so transparent as to look invisible. This was a wondrous thing.

„What are we going to do, Quint?“ Sally asked suddenly.

„With our friend here?“ he replied.

„No. The Paladin.” Her sarcasm was light but pointed. „Of course, our friend. Has Ed given any thought to reversing the machine if he was successful – as he obviously was?“

„Not that I heard.”

„Then this poor man may be stranded here.”

Quintan shook his head. „I really did not want to think about that, Precious, but you are right.”

„What an awful thing to do.”

„I completely agree. It is horrifying.”

The ground car rolled up to the parking lot for the Urbana Quantum Physics Laboratory. The building and grounds were well-lighted throughout the night hours. The lab building itself was a low structure designed to fit in with the landscaping. She swung the vehicle into a marked parking place. Both quickly exited the car, and the German looked around wildly.

„Was jetzt?“ (*Now what?*) he asked out loud.

A moment later, the door opened, and the man stood outside. He snapped open a large umbrella and made a *come here* motion with his hand. The German climbed out and looked up at the umbrella.

„Ein Regenschirm, danke Ihnen. Wo gehen wir hin?“ (*Umbrella. I thank you. Where are we going?*)

Sally sprinted to the lab door, placing her index finger into a socket. The equipment took a whiff of her DNA, looked at the fingerprint, and the door slid open. Once Quint and the German stepped in, the door slid shut. The German physically jumped when the door moved. Sally turned and placed her finger in the socket on the other wall. Momentarily, the inner door slid open.

He watched the door slide open and was startled when the first door slid shut. Between the shock of his arrival, and the things he had seen, the German man was losing his capacity for surprise, though this was another wondrous thing. The woman stepped into the brightly lit building, and he followed. He stopped and turned around to look at the surroundings. It was pleasantly warm in the building, which was a nice change. He grew used to the lighting but could not determine its source. The floor resembled the polished granite of the Elector's palace but was different, somehow.

„Na gut. Ich muss eine Aufklärung verlangen. Wo haben sie mich hingebracht? Was ist passiert? Ich glaube nicht, dass Sie Dämonen sind, aber das hier ist sehr seltsam.“ (*Very well, I must insist. Where have you taken me? What has happened? I do not believe you are demons, but this is very strange.*)

Quintan turned to the German. „I am sorry,” he spoke loudly, „but I cannot understand you.”

„Quint, he will not understand you when you speak louder. It is another language.”

The man shook his head in frustration. „Oh, I know. I just do not see any good ending to this adventure.”

„Was haben Sie gesagt?“ (*What did you say?*)

Quintan looked at the German and raised both hands, palm up, in frustration. „Sorry.”

„Come on,” Sally said, „Let us get to the lab.”

She started walking quickly down the hallway. Quintan grasped the German's arm and tried to start walking, but the German did not move.

„Ich weigere mich einen weiteren Schritt zu machen, bevor ich keine Erklärung für diesen Wahnsinn hier bekomme. Das ist eine Zumutung. Das müssen Sie doch begreifen.“ (*I refuse to take another step until I receive an*

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explanation for this madness. This is beyond unreasonable. Surely, you must recognize this fact.)

Quint stopped. "What did he say, Sally?"

"How would I know. Come on."

"He won't move."

She stood further down the hall, facing them with her hands on her hips. The German noticed for the first time she was wearing trousers. He shook his head in disbelief. He didn't think she was that kind of woman, but the man was also dressed strangely.

She waved her arm at him. "Come!"

„Kommt?“ He thought he recognized that word.

"Yes, yes. Come here."

He finally shrugged and began trudging down the hall towards the strange woman, his heels tapping on the floor. She turned again and walked at a fast pace further down the hallway. A few moments later, she stopped in front of another area he perceived as another of those sliding doors. Again, it slid open.

He started to follow the woman into the room beyond the door and stopped halfway in. The woman tried to tug him into the room, but he stood frozen in the doorway. Here were many more wonders. His eyes could not resolve the shapes. As he scanned the room, his vision was assaulted by lights and square lighted panels with script dancing on them. The air smelled like a summer thunderstorm. Behind him, a raucous instrument began blaring a single off-key note.

"Get him into the room, Quint, and shut off the door alarm."

"Come on, Sir," the man said.

The German swung his head back and forth, then stepped into the room. The door immediately slid shut, and the horn halted.

„Was ein schreckliches Geräusch. Was für ein Ort ist das hier?“ (*What an awful noise. What is this place now?*)

Another man quickly walked into view. "Can you stop with the racket? How is a body to get any work done? And who is he?"

"Suppose you tell us who he is, Edgar," Quint said. "You activated the machine, didn't you?"

"How did you know that?"

"Ed, take a close look. Where do you think he came from?" Sally snapped, pointing to the German.

Edgar Forsenn, the lead scientist on the Paladin's Quantum Tunneling project, stared at the German, and gradually his mouth dropped open.

③

"Where... where did you find him?" The scientist was maybe six feet tall and was dressed in tattered slacks and a filthy wrinkled shirt. He pointed to the German in shock.

"We found him lying in the road. Partway up the hill from the highway. It was on lab property, thank the saints."

Forsenn was shaking his head slowly back and forth as he continued pointing at the German. "It cannot be. It's not supposed to do that. The equipment is not powerful enough to throw that much mass that far. It's got to be something else."

He turned away, muttering, stepped back to his equipment, and started typing madly on a keyboard.

„Was ist los?“ the German asked.

Sally turned to him. "I wish we understood you."

„Ich muss auf Toilette!“ (*I must use the fresher*)

"What did he say?" Quintan asked.

"How should I know, Quint?" she asked.

The German swung his head as he looked around. „Es wird immer dringender für mich meine Bedürfnisse zu erfüllen.“ (*It is becoming quite necessary for me to take care of my needs.*)

"He is getting agitated, Sally," Quintan said.

"Hey, could you hold it down over there?" Forsenn yelled. "I have problems too."

Quintan stomped over to the other scientist. "Ed, I am about this far from putting your head through the display panel. You had better start thinking about the consequences of your action. You have ripped that poor man from who-knows-where, and you are worried about your stupid calculations!"

Forsenn glared back at Quintan. "Yes? Well, if we do not nail down the problems with the tunneling machine, that poor man is stuck here. I am as concerned about him as you. And I am doing something about it."

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Quintan raised his arms in the air and turned around to look helplessly at Sally.

„Mir wird gleich ein Missgeschick passieren.“ (*I am about to have an accident*). He then reached down, grabbed his crotch, and pulled his legs together.

“He has got to visit the fresher, Quint,” Sally said. “You are going to have to show him. I suspect there is not a lot of time.”

“Right.” He walked quickly over to the German and took his arm. “This way, friend.”

He quickly pulled the German out of the lab, and the doors closed again. Sally walked over to Forsenn.

“I hope you realize you are in a lot of trouble, Edgar.”

“Do I not just know it,” he replied. “It is a wonder I did not transform the apparatus into slag.”

“That is not what I meant. You have pulled someone into this against his will. How many of his basic rights have you violated?”

Forsenn turned pale. He stopped typing and stared at Sally. Then he took a deep breath. “I just destroyed my career, did I not?”

She shrugged. “Who knows. But you are certainly facing an inquiry. This is a pet project for the Paladin. What do you want to bet he will be here to participate in the investigation?”

“Sally, I do not need to hear this right now.”

“None of us do, Edgar. But, compared to the director and the Paladin, what Quint and I are giving you will feel like love taps.”

With the German in tow, Quintan slammed into the men's fresher. The bright, white lighting blinked on as they stepped in. Fortunately, it was just down the hall from Forsenn's lab.

“Probably a good idea you had to go,” Quintan said. “I have to go myself.”

He walked the German over to the urinals. “Here is the procedure,” he said, stepping up to the urinal and unsealing his trousers. “Just aim and spritz, old boy.”

The German stared at the fixtures and then nodded in comprehension. He turned around, backed up to the urinal, and pulled down his trousers.

“No! Wait!” Quintan said.

He rapidly re-sealed and guided the German into one of the stalls. “Here you go. Sorry about that.”

The poor man nodded, pulled down his pants, and sat down. The ensuing sounds were immediate.

“Not a moment too soon, I guess,” Quintan said. “One other thing...”

He reached in and pulled tissue off the roll and mimed wiping himself. “Like this, see?”

„Ja, ja. Ich verstehe. Dankeschön.“ (*Yes, yes, I understand. Thank you very much.*) the German said with obvious relief.

“Okay, then, let me take care of my business.”

Quintan stepped uncomfortably back over to the urinal. The current culture avoided direct references to bodily functions. People didn't even use euphemisms; they simply excused themselves from whatever they were doing to visit the freshers. Men never spoke to one another in the public freshers. They maintained an invisible wall of privacy about them as they came and went. Quintan was glad no one else was in the room at this time. At least that embarrassment was avoided.

He heard the bowl flush, so he moved over to where the German pulled up his trousers and stared at the fixture.

„Ein weiteres fabelhaftes Gerät. Der Dreck verschwindet einfach. Und das Papier ist auch so weich. Welch wunderbare Dinge Sie hier haben.“ (*Another marvelous device. The muck just disappears. And the paper is so soft, too. What wondrous things you have here.*)

“I suspect you will be seeing a lot more, Friend. I wish I knew your name. Wait a minute.” He pointed to himself. “Quintan.”

The German tilted his head, then pointed to himself. “Johann.”

“Very well, Johann, step over here.” He motioned the other man to the appliances lining the wall under a mirror.

The German stepped over to gaze at the mirror. He had seen small mirrors before – his wife had one. But never this large or clear. It covered the entire wall.

“Put your hands here,” Quintan said. “Here, let me show you.”

Quintan placed his hands through the flexible gates into the sanitizer. In about ten seconds, his hands were sprayed with an antiseptic detergent, stroked with sponges, dried with a blast of air, and then sprayed again with a light lotion. He pulled his hands out, rubbed them together, then motioned to *Johann*.

The German studied the box, then eased his hands into the device. His eyes opened wide as it began operating. He

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started to pull them out but looked at Quintan and grimaced, holding his hands in as it worked. When it stopped, he slid his hands out and looked at them on both sides. He held a hand up to his nose and sniffed.

„Hmmm. Das riecht gut.“ (*Hmmm. Smells good.*)

Quintan chuckled. “Yes, I guess it is. Whatever you just said. I suppose we had better get back to the others.”

Johann followed Quintan back down the hall to the lab, where they found Sally and Edgar Forsenn bent over a display screen and arguing. Sally looked up.

“Everything okay, Quint?”

“Yes. The... interruption was necessary. We are fine.”

“Good.”

“And his name is Johann.”

The German looked at the other two. „Ich heie Johann.“ (*My name is Johann.*)

Forsenn stared at the German briefly, then collapsed into a chair and buried his face in his hands. “My God, what have I done?”

↳

Arnold Gingery awakened in a sweat. “What is the matter with that accursed enviro system?”

His wife Gail stepped from the fresher into the bedroom in her underwear and a sheen of sweat. “It was down to about fifty degrees in here during the night. I trust you are going to have it repaired.”

“I do not know if we need to repair it or perform an exorcism on the thing,” he said. “It must be possessed. I will put in a repair request as soon as I get dressed. You will need to be here when the repair tech arrives.”

She quickly put on a set of casual clothes. “I refuse to stay in this house for a moment longer than necessary. I am going to mother's. You can comm me when the thing is fixed.”

“Give me a few moments to get ready, and I will drop you off.”

“In no way, Arnold. I am taking the groundcar. You can comm the livery. And here comes the cold air again.” She shook her head in frustration. “Comm me, Arnold.”

So Arnold's wife had taken the groundcar and departed to spend the day with her mother. That was not such a bad thing as far as he was concerned, except it eliminated his normal mode of transportation to work. Calling the local livery service cost him more Solars than he wanted to spend, and it deposited him at the laboratory a half hour late.

At the office, Gingery was immediately confronted with the results of one of Edgar Forsen's experiments, which had gone disastrously awry. Forsen's failures were usually spectacular, but this one topped the others measurably.

“Do you want to tell me, please, Edgar, why you decided to run the experiment at four in the morning without the control crew in place? What you accomplished is bad enough, but nobody would have known what happened if you had had a lab accident.”

Forsen scratched his head. He had been up for two straight nights completing the final work on the apparatus and was starting to feel the fatigue. “I am sorry, Arnie. I got the test rig running, and the diagnostics were clean, so I thought, what the hoot, we will give it a shot.”

“And you pulled some poor soul from who knows where.”

“I know, and I am sorry about that. I am working on creating the calculations to send him back.”

Gingery clasped his hands behind his back and paced the lab. On his second trip, he stopped to face Forsen again. “Ed, what if we cannot send this... Johann back?”

“There has got to be a way to send him back, Arnie. I refuse to accept the idea that I have destroyed his life.”

Sally Rogers stood watching the exchange. “Temporal theory says you cannot send him back.”

Forsen looked over at her with a tortured expression. “Do not say that. We have got to send him back.”

“To what? To where Ed? You are opening up all kinds of paradoxes here.”

“That is just ancient science fiction, Sally.”

“Johann does not look like fiction to me?”

“I did not mean for this to happen!” he shrieked. “What am I ever going to do?”

Gingery reached out with his index finger and poked Forsen in the chest. “You and Sally are the best theoretical physicists we have. You are going to figure out what happened and how to reverse it. Now, get yourself under control.”

“I need Quintan to help,” Sally said.

“Quintan is busy babysitting our other problem,” Gingery said. “Our *big* problem.”

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Sally stepped over to Arnold. "I get my best ideas by bouncing them off Quint. I need him, Arnie. Could you look after Johann?"

"If I have to say this, Sally, I have a lab to run. And I need to call the Paladin. He absolutely needs to know about this."

"Oh, please do not call the paladin, Arnie," Forsen begged. "It will be the end of my career."

Gingery just looked at the scientist. Then he turned to Sally. "Okay, where do you have Edgar's German parked?"

"Quint took him to the lounge."

"Oh, great. Just what I need. The whole facility will know about this within the hour."

"Do you not think everybody already knows, Arnie?" she asked softly. "I mean, Ed has well and truly blown a hole in the bottom of our boat."

"Then I must call the Paladin. Word will surely get out, and he must hear it from me first."

Without another word, Gingery spun on a heel and left the room. Sally and Edgar looked at each other.

"I guess this is the end of my career," he said.

"We need to find out what happened, Ed. If we can reverse the process, no permanent harm may be done."

A few minutes later, Gingery walked into the lounge, where Quintan Rogers sat across the table from Johann. The German stood up when he saw the lab administrator.

„Ich heiÙe Johann,“ he said.

"What did he say?" Gingery asked.

"His name is Johann," Quint repeated. "We have been experimenting with different foods. He likes the hot chocolate, and he ate a bratwurst sandwich."

„Die Bratwurst hat geschmeckt, als ob der Schweinedarm nicht ordentlich ausgewaschen wurde.“ (*The bratwurst tasted like somebody did not get the pig's intestine cleaned out properly.*)

"What did he say?" Gingery asked.

"I have no idea. I'm starting to pick up a few words here and there, and so is he. But we are a long way from truly communicating."

"Well, I guess I will have to take it from here. Sally needs you in the lab."

"You will take care of Johann?" Quintan asked.

The German looked back and forth between the two men in puzzlement.

„Worüber sprechen Sie?“ (*What are you two gentlemen talking about?*)

"I guess I will have to." He turned to Johann. "Johann, I need to get back to my wife. Arnold here will help you for a while."

„Du bist Arnold?“

"Yes, I guess I am Arnold." Gingery shook his head as he realized the sentence made no real sense. "Why not come with me to my office?"

„Wie bitte?“ (*What?*)

Gingery shook his head again and made motioning signs with his hands for the German to follow him. Quint Rogers watched as the two men left the room.

"What a colossal mess!" he said.

„Wie bitte?“

§

Johann once again rode in the back seat of the Rogers' groundcar. Quintan and Sally were in the front. It was late afternoon, and the winter skies were dark. The rain had changed to snow, and the flakes danced in front of the car's lights. Johann pointed out the windshield.

„Schauen Sie! Schnee! Es war Hochsommer heute Morgen in Leipzig. Was ist mit mir passiert?“ (*Look! Snow! It was midsummer this morning in Leipzig. What has happened to me?*)

Quintan shook his head. "I am sorry, Johann. I cannot understand you, and I wish I could."

„Wie bitte?“

Sally turned around in the seat to face the German. "We are taking you to stay at our house. It is much more comfortable than the lab."

"Besides," Quintan added, "Ed needed to crash."

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„Was heißt 'crash?'“ (*What is this 'crash?'*)

They heard the last word. Sally folded her hands together and leaned her head against them. “Crash. It means sleep.”

„Ahhh. Schlafen. Crash. Vielleicht werde ich irgendwann Ihre abscheuliche Sprache verstehen.“ (*Ahhh. Sleep. Crash. Maybe I will understand your vile tongue.*)

Quintan pulled the groundcar into the garage of the Rogers' expansive home. This time Johann was able to figure out the door controls and climb out of the car. He followed them into the kitchen of the house. Sally turned to Johann and held her arms out in a welcoming gesture.

“Welcome to our home. You can stay with us for now. Tomorrow we will go back to the lab.”

The German looked at her, then around the kitchen, and jumped as a teenage girl with long brown hair walked into the kitchen.

“Johann,” Sally said, “This is our daughter, Lauren. Lauren, this is Johann.”

„Tochter?“ (*Daughter?*)

Quintan nodded. “Right. Daughter.”

Johann sketched a short bow. „Ich fühle mich geehrt.“ (*I am honored.*)

“Pleased to meet you, Johann,” Lauren said. She looked at her mother. “What is with the garb? And what is he speaking?”

“A long story,” Sally replied, “and not one to be told outside this house.”

“So, Ed's experiment worked?”

“That is the problem. It did not work quite as he anticipated.”

“And so Johann is from...,” she turned pale. “Oh my.”

“Exactly. Right now, we need to make Johann as comfortable as possible under the circumstances.”

“Okay, Mom. Do you need help with dinner?”

“Have you completed your practice?”

“Umm. No. Rachel kept me on the comm all afternoon.”

Sally put her hands on her hips. “All you have to say, young lady, is that you have things to do.”

“But Rachel would not understand.” The whine was noticeable.

“I can do the dinner,” Sally said, “You can do the practice. As much as we pay for lessons...”

“I know.” And Lauren turned to leave the room.

Johann had been studying the exchange and spoke. „Mütter und Töchter sind überall die Selben.“ (*Mothers and daughters are the same everywhere.*) He spoke with a smile.

Sally laughed. “I think I understood that one.” She pointed to one of the kitchen chairs. “Have a seat, Johann. We can talk while I prepare dinner. Eventually, we will start communicating. Quint, can you check to make sure the apartment is ready for guests?”

Quintan nodded and walked from the room. Johann had just sat down when music emerged from the other room.

„Was ist das?“ (*What is that?*)

“Oh, Lauren is practicing piano.”

„Das muss ich sehen.“ (*I must see this.*)

He stood and marched from the room. Sally grinned and continued with the meal preparations. Lauren was playing the piece by Eshleemann she was preparing for the Secondary School music festival. Sally was convinced the girl showed talent if she could be cajoled into practicing regularly. Sally liked to hear her daughter play; this song was a favorite.

The song proceeded through the middle third and into a section where Lauren continually had problems. A recurrent complex chord progression required the pianist's hands to move apart in an expanding run. While the chords were not that difficult, it did require the musician to trust her hands were in the right places – therefore requiring a lot of confidence. Lauren splattered a chord and muttered a few well-chosen words.

“Be careful with the language, young lady,” Sally called.

She heard a question in German and Lauren's “What?” Then more German.

The chord progression was then repeated slowly on the upper octaves of the keyboard. Then more German. The passage came again in the normal register. He was teaching Lauren! He repeated the progression with just the top and bottom notes of the chord. She repeated them with him. They worked their way through several repetitions. Then he added another note in each chord and ran the repetition.

After about fifteen minutes, the chord progression began repeating correctly. Sally peeked through the doorway to

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see Lauren playing the chord structure with a look of concentration on her face. Johann sat beside her on the bench, carefully studying her technique.

Sally shook her head as she returned to her task. The German apparently knew music. Lauren completed the piece, and Sally heard the German talking quietly again. A few moments later, the song started again, this time a bit more slowly, but the playing sounded more precise. Sally listened, enjoying the cadences of the piece, until she heard a tapping at the door. She turned to see Lauren pointing to the piano. She walked over to the doorway and looked to see Johann sitting at the piano and working his way through the Eshlemann. He completed the selection and smiled at the Rogers mother and daughter.

„Das Spielen dieses Pianoforte ist viel besser als bei dem, das ich vorher gespielt habe. Aber ich würde immer noch lieber mein Cembalo haben.“ (*The action on this pianoforte is much better than the one I tried before. But I would still rather have my harpsichord.*)

Lauren rolled her eyes. “Whatever. Mom, this guy is pretty good.”

Johann began playing again, this time a composition with an elaborate contrapuntal structure. His fingers flew over the keyboard. As he played, Quintan stepped into the room through the other doorway and leaned against the jamb as he listened. It was not a long piece, and Johann brought it to a quick halt.

“I have never heard anything like that,” Quintan said. “It was lovely.”

„Ich hoffe ich habe Sie nicht gestört. Bitte proben Sie weiter. Sie müssen mehr üben für diese Musik.“ (*I hope I did not disturb you.*) He stood and pointed his arms at Lauren and then at the bench. (*Please, continue your rehearsal. You require more work on this music.*)

“I think he wants me to keep practicing, Mom,” Lauren said.

“By all means,” Sally said with a laugh. “It is free instruction.”

Dinner was interesting. What began as an incomprehensible interaction between German and Anglo did not become intelligible. But, the people at the table gradually began to understand one another. Johann enjoyed a large helping of potatoes and had seconds. He tasted the sweet corn and ate no more of that. And he seemed to enjoy the chicken filet. By the end of the meal, it was clear the man was worn out. He had yawned several times and looked like he did not quite know what to do next.

Quintan took him to the small apartment attached to their home. It contained a sitting room with a kitchenette, a bedroom, and a fresher. Quintan had laid out a spare pair of pajamas and then showed Johann the shower, along with miming the motions for washing. The German did smell somewhat as though he had been laboring physically. Quintan also showed Johann how to operate the lights and the video station.

Sally's elderly mother had lived in the apartment for a decade or longer before old age finally took her. Because she had developed the tendency to wander off, Quintan had installed a security system, which notified them when anyone entered or left the apartment. He now felt safe enough to leave the involuntary guest alone for the night.

“We need to do something about his clothes,” Sally said when Quintan returned to the sitting room.

“I do not know his size.”

“Men! I know I can get within about fifteen percent. And I already ordered something.”

“You did?”

She looked at him as she often did when she thought he was being dense. “I ordered him a suit, underwear, and shoes from Quandark. It should be here in the morning.”

Quandark was one of the major retailers in the Palatinate. Customers could receive merchandise within twelve hours by ordering via the global network. The Palatinate supported package delivery services that were rapid and efficient.

“What is that going to cost?” Quintan asked.

“The lab is going to pay for it.”

“Arnie will pop an eyeball when you charge that.”

“No, he will not. He is frightened to death of what the Paladin will do.”

“I am frightened to death of what the Paladin will do. Did he manage to contact him today?” Quintan asked.

Sally shook her head. “I understand the Paladin is off-planet at the moment. His chief of staff promises to have him call as soon as he is in-system.”

“I did not think the Paladin ever went out-system. He usually sticks pretty close to home.”

Sally shrugged. “I heard his son was restarting the terraforming project on Mars, and there was some kind of a formal kick-off or dedication.”

“I saw that on the news-vid. I did not realize that was the Paladin's son.”

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"I think the paladin is financing it."

Quintan snorted. "That would be a lot of Solars to pour into that hole in space."

"His track record has been pretty good so far."

"Except for financing Ed Forsenn's lab."

Sally laughed out loud. "You just might have a point there, sweetheart."

⑥

The materials and mechanisms continually amazed him. Johann awoke and rolled over to look at the softly glowing numerals of the small panel on the wall. He had stared at the slowly changing numbers the previous night before he went to sleep and now recognized, in surprise, that he was looking at a clock. It was 6:13 AM, according to the device. He was familiar with clock mechanisms but could not imagine how one could build something to display the actual numbers.

He had once visited the Margrave of Brandenburg and had been impressed with the luxury of the Margrave's castle. But, here he was wallowing in unimaginable richness. Would heaven be like this? The cotton night clothes were soft and supple. The bed was smooth and soft, not lumpy and scratchy like the straw-filled sacks he was used to sleeping on. And his underclothes were cotton too. He had seen cotton in Leipzig, but it was rare and valuable. Much more comfortable than the usual linen. And he had seen no linen here.

The wealth here was deceptively simple. It was not flaunted like the nobles back home did. It was just a part of life. What was this place?

Despite the repeated shock, or maybe because of them, Johann had slept heavily and well. He was awake now. The pressure in his bladder impelled him to arise, anyway. When he placed his feet on the floor, the lights in the room gradually brightened from their night-time dimness. His feet settled into the carpet, and he savored the sensation. Such comfort. He walked out of the bedroom and down the short hall to what his host had called the *frescher*, which was much more than an elaborate indoor privy. He took care of his business and then studied the room.

While he was a good German and took pains to be clean and neat, the concept of a shower was at once logical and unexpected. Quintan had shown him the soap and the washcloth. He knew what the towel was for, but once again, the experience of the cotton terry was an unimaginable pleasure. He studied the shower and knew he would not need to use it for another week, but it was enticing. Why not?

"I think Johann is in the shower again," Sally said as she walked past Quintan in the master fresher.

"He has probably never experienced anything like it," Quintan chuckled.

"Maybe you ought to lay out his new clothes for him."

"I should have thought of that myself," he said. He laid down the depilator. "Do not go away. I will be right back."

"I would not think of it," Sally laughed as she stepped out of her robe and into the shower.

Johann scrubbed himself carefully as he enjoyed the hot water sluicing over him. Imagine not having to heat the water for a bath. He was not sure he liked the odor the soap left on him. But he had noticed everyone else smelled faintly of soap and wondered if his more earthy smell had offended them. These people, especially Quintan and Sally, had made huge efforts to make him comfortable, and he did not want to insult them. So he scrubbed enthusiastically.

This small cubicle with the hot water falling from the pipe was such a marvelous wonder. Anna would be thrilled by something like this. He wished he could tell her about it. And then, he was seized with grief. The fear lurking in the background slammed into him with a force that caused him to slump against the shower wall. He knew then he would never see Anna again. Once before, he had suffered that crushing sorrow when his first wife died. And now, he had lost another, somehow. All he knew was that she was alive somewhere else, and he was as sure as anything in his life that he would never return. How would she fare? What would become of his children?

Johan turned his face to the wall and wept as the hot water rolled comfortingly down his back. Quintan had carefully laid the trousers and jacket on the bed in the apartment. He set the shoes in front and spread the socks over them. He laid out another set of underwear. After briefly inspecting his work, he stepped out of the bedroom to hear broken-hearted sobbing over the sound of the shower. He stared at the fresher door for a moment, then shook his head.

"You poor man," he whispered.

###

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Without a signal or a knock, the office door slid open, and the big, beefy man strode across the room and planted his fists on Arnold Gingery's desk.

"Would you mind explaining to me, Arnie, how you could allow this incredible cock-up to occur?"

Gingery stood quickly. "Paladin, I... I..."

"Did I, or did I not tell you to ride herd on the scientists? Didn't you understand me when I instructed you to allow them to just do research?"

"Paladin, I am sorry, but I carefully restricted Edgar's activities. He was working late and decided to run an experiment with the apparatus. He did it without authorization."

"This is precisely what we wanted to avoid. How could you be so careless?"

A tall, thin blond woman walked into the room and up to the Paladin. "Darling, Arnie would not purposely allow something like this to happen."

"Well, I should hope to heaven he wouldn't." He turned back to the administrator. "I can't believe you let it happen."

"Darling, sit down and take a deep breath." The woman allowed an edge in her voice.

The Paladin collapsed into the chair across the desk from the administrator. "Okay, Arnie. Talk to me."

Gingery remained standing. "Sir, things were fine when I left here that night. When I came in the next morning, they... they had this poor man whom the trans-temporal field generator had pulled in from his time. Sir, I did my job. This just happened."

He hesitated and then spoke again. "I know I am responsible, Sir. I have my resignation prepared."

The Paladin swung his head back and forth. "Oh, I know it's not your fault, Arnie. If I fired you, who would I get to ride herd on the scientists?"

Gingery sighed in relief and slipped into his chair. "Thank you, Paladin, but it is still a major setback."

The Paladin stared at him. "You still don't understand, do you, Arnie? It may not have been your fault. But it's your lab. It really *is* your responsibility. That's why I put you here!"

"There is no reason to be angry, Darling," the blond woman said.

He glanced over at her. "Precious, I am rightfully just about as mad as I can be. That poor man. We dragged him how many years into the future, Arnie?"

"About eight hundred, I think."

"What if he had a wife and kids? He must be frantic." The Paladin choked. "He doesn't realize his people are eight-hundred years in the grave."

"Oh, Scott!" the woman said as she leaned over to put her arm around his shoulders.

The Paladin sniffed and looked up at Gingery. "I'm sorry, Arnie. I'm not behaving well. This has reopened an old wound I thought had healed long ago. I guess I was wrong."

"I don't understand, Sir," Gingery said.

"Never mind, Arnie. I really can't talk about it right now." He stood up. "Where is our refugee now?"

Gingery stood up. "There is one other problem, Paladin."

"Oh, crud. Now what?"

"Apparently, our security has been compromised."

"Can't you do anything right?" the Paladin flared. "This just gets worse and worse."

"I tried to comm you repeatedly and was told you were off-planet."

"I was out on Mars."

"Oh, your son's project?"

"Right. Rusty deserved for me to be there. Now, what about the security compromise?"

"I could not get in touch with you, Sir. And I kept a tight lid on things here. If you found out as much as you did, something leaked somewhere."

"Oh." The Paladin scratched his head. "There's no leak, Arnie."

"But..."

"You're going to have to trust me on this. Now, take us to see this poor man."

7

Johann sat in a cubicle located in one corner of the lab. A mug of coffee sat on the desktop at his elbow. He had, in

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times past, performed with a small group of singers in the coffee houses in Leipzig and had developed a taste for the brew. This stuff here was called coffee, but it was another of the few things he had experienced in this place that was not... excellent. It was barely passable.

On the desk in front of him was another of the marvelous devices that seemed to be everywhere. It was shaped like a book but was solid and made of metal, glass, or something. Sally had shown him what to do with it. When he touched a corner with his index finger, a pattern of lights and symbols appeared mysteriously in the air above the device. He could reach out and touch the symbols, and they felt at different times, wet, slippery, or rubbery. She taught him to twist several symbols and display a list of items. Music would come forth when he tapped an object with his index finger!

Johann managed to amuse himself for most of that morning by perusing the long list of items that produced music. To his trained ear, some of it was very good. Other selections were... not so good. But, it was all interesting – and very different from his experience. He recognized some instruments; others sounded familiar, like violins or trumpets, but with a subtly different timbre. At least the intervals were well-tempered.

Sally had shown him how to instruct another machine to brew coffee for him, such as it was. Yet another would produce sandwiches or sweets selected from pictures. He had learned how to place his hand on a spot next to the lab door, and the door would slide open at his command. He knew where the fresher was, so he could function independently, within limits. He knew Quintan and Sally were working with Edgar to correct the problem that brought him, but from the looks on their faces, he suspected that returning him to Leipzig was not something they were convinced was possible. Sitting and listening to this odd music, he prayed God would help them find a solution. He missed Anna and the children.

The door to the lab slid open, and a large, tall man walked into the room. He leaned over the top of the divider and looked at Johann with a friendly smile.

“Did you run out of things to do, or are you looking for inspiration?”

„Es tut mir Leid, Sir, aber ich verstehe Sie nicht.“ (*I am sorry, Sir, but I do not understand.*)

The man looked surprised and shook his head. “I am very sorry. I thought you were a lab employee. I suspect you are our guest.”

„Ich heiÙe Johann.“

“I think I understood that.” He pointed to himself. “I am Scott.” He pointed to the tall, thin blond woman who had stepped beside him. “This is Kimberly.”

„Es ist mir eine Ehre Sie kennen zu lernen, Sir.“ (*An honor to meet you, Sir.*)

The man turned to the woman. “I wish we could understand him.”

“He must feel very lost here,” she replied.

“We'd better talk to our unruly children and see what they plan to do about this.”

The woman looked at Johann. “We will talk to you later.”

Johann looked curiously at the new people as they walked away and wondered who they were.

Edgar Forsenn spotted the Paladin and his wife as they walked across the room and jumped to his feet. He held his hands together behind his back and wrung them. Sally and Quintan Rogers looked up when Forsenn stood, then jumped to their feet when they saw who walked in.

“Well, Stanley, it's a fine kettle of fish you've gotten us into,” the Paladin said.

Forsenn looked completely confused. “Excuse me, Sir?”

The Paladin's wife squeezed his arm. “Stop that, Scott!”

“Sorry,” he said. “A poor excuse for a joke, I guess.”

“I am very sorry, Paladin, but I have caused a disaster. This is the worst event in my life.”

“I'm not prepared to argue with you about that, Edgar. What I want to know is how you're planning to fix it.”

“Well, we must send him back.”

“Can you do that?” the Paladin asked.

“We must.”

The Paladin looked over at Quintan and Sally. “What do you think? Can we send him back?”

Sally shook her head. “That raises all kinds of questions about causality.”

“In other words, by sending him back, could we change his future and write ourselves out of the story?”

“Right. I do not believe it is possible. If you start down that road in your thinking, you will run up against some hard limits in space-time theory.”

“We got him here. We should be able to send him back,” Forsenn said. He started rubbing his palms against his trousers. “We must.”

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Sally frowned as she shook her head.

The Paladin looked back and forth between them. “What I'm hearing is that you don't even have a consensus on what you did. Ed, what were you thinking when you pulled the trigger on this thing?”

“I was not attempting to transfer anyone. The field calculations finally lined up for me, and I attempted to project a trans-temporal quantum singularity. It should have been unnoticeable to anyone it passed across. The readings confirmed the field reached across time.”

“Yes, and it bounced Johann onto his behind in the road in front of our groundcar,” Quintan interjected. “We nearly ran over him.”

“It should not have done that.”

The Paladin stepped forward and grasped Forsenn by the shoulders. “You've got to get past this impossibility. *Something* was clearly possible, Ed. It happened. Ergo, you had better start looking at the less likely possibilities. If the event did not match your calculations, I'm inclined to think the problem is somewhere in your math.”

“I just cannot believe that, Paladin. The calculations fit together so well.”

The Paladin just raised an eyebrow.

“Okay, okay. I will tear the calculations apart and look at them again.”

“Thank you, Ed. Now, how are we taking care of our unintended guest?”

Quitan held up his hand. “He is staying with us for the moment.”

“Is that a problem? In the short term, anyway?”

“No, Sir. We have an apartment attached to our home. He seems to be comfortable there.”

“Okay. Keep track of your expenses. I'm not expecting you to do this out of the goodness of your heart.”

“But, Paladin,” Sally said, “that is exactly why we are doing this. Where else could he go?”

The Paladin held up his hands. “I'm sorry. A poor choice of words. I am delighted you chose to take in this man – in any way you describe it, he's a refugee. I'm simply saying I'll cover the cost. Honestly, in the long term, if we can't send him back, it will be my responsibility anyway.”

“I do not even want to think about that,” Sally said.

“Are you communicating with Johann?” the Paladin's wife asked.

“Not really,” Sally said. “We are starting to pick up some common words.”

The Paladin snapped his fingers. “That I can do something about.” He pulled out his hand comm and stepped away from the others.

“Hey. I need some help here.” He spoke into the comm unit, but the others could not hear the response.

“We have a German across the room from me from about eight-hundred years ago.”

“No. An experiment in the lab had some unexpected results.”

“I don't know about that, but he's sitting across the room from me listening to music on a comp term.”

“You got it, buddy. I think you'll have to stick close until we get this settled.”

He listened some more. “Yeah, I hear ya. We're probably going to need your help with that too.”

“Ciao.”

The Paladin folded the clamshell comm unit and slipped it into his pocket. He turned to face the scientists. “Well, I rustled up some help for Johann. It occurred to me that an AI could figure out how to speak German.”

“You have the comm code for an AI?” Forsenn asked.

“Yes, I do. But like everything else in this lab, it's a state secret. I need to get back to Chicago. I want a status report from you at the end of each day. If something immediate comes up, you are to comm me directly.”

“Yes, Sir. What about Johann?”

“Take good care of him, Ed. He is our guest.”

As Johann listened to the music, he noticed a bright point of light blink into existence above the device he thought of as a music box. The point expanded into a bright line and then unfolded to form what looked like a drawing of a stilty-legged bird. It stepped from behind the display and faced him directly.

„Ich grüße Sie, Johann.“ (*Greetings, Johann.*)

„Gott im Himmel!“ Johann shouted, and slid his chair back.

„Was ist los?“ The bird asked.

The Paladin walked over to the cubicle and looked down at the desktop. “I've told you before to lose the bird. It gives people the creeps.”

“I judged the anthropomorphism would be helpful for our disoriented visitor.” The warm, mellifluous voice said.

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“Well, it didn't help. And he's clearly not disoriented.”

“Very well, Scott,” the bird sniffed. It then folded in on itself and winked out. “Is this better?”

Johann leaned back forward. „Wie kann das sein, dass ein Vogel sprechen kann?“ (*How is it that a bird can speak?*)

The voice responded. „Das war eine Figur. Sie war nicht echt.“ (*It was a representation. It was not real.*)

„Wer sind Sie?“ (*Who are you?*)

„Ich helfe den Leuten hier. Sie haben mich einberufen, weil ich Ihre Sprache sprechen kann.“ (*I am a helper for the people in this place. They have enlisted me because I can speak your language.*)

„Das ist eine weitere erstaunliche Sache über diesen Ort.“ (*This is yet another amazing thing about this place.*)

The Paladin shook his head and turned to his wife. “Hopefully, things are under control. Let's get out of here before I start throwing things. I can't believe they let something like this happen.”

She turned to the scientists. “There are some reasons you are unaware of why my husband is so upset about this event. Please keep us informed of your progress.”

“Of course,” Forsenn murmured as he bobbed his head.

§

It was quiet in the aircar as the Paladin and his wife flew north from Urbana. The pilot watched the instruments carefully and also scanned the skies. The soft *shush* of the air as it rushed past the vehicle was soothing. Yet, the Paladin clenched and unclenched his fists as he stared straight ahead. His wife leaned towards him.

“What are you thinking, Scott?”

He continued staring ahead for several moments, then shook his head and snorted softly.

“That poor man.”

“There is more to it than that, is there not?”

He turned and smiled sadly at her. “I guess seeing Johann's predicament got me feeling sorry for myself again.”

She reached out and laid a hand on his. “Would you go back if you could, Scott?”

“Come on, Kimberly, that's an unfair question. You shouldn't put me on the spot like that.”

“Is that not what you were asking yourself?” she asked.

“No, it was not. I was thinking about what the poor man had lost. I wonder if he left a wife and children behind. And sure as God made little green apples, we won't be able to send him back.”

“When you funded the temporal laboratory, I wondered if you were trying to find a way to go back yourself.”

He turned in the seat and took her hands in his. “I love you, Precious. We have been married for nearly forty years. That's twice as long as I was married to Sondra before Pop and I got dragged out of that time and place. I would never try to leave you. The past is dead and buried. I thought I had gotten over the hurt. Seeing Johann ripped the wound open again.”

“Oh, Scott. Forgive me for being so unguarded.”

“Of course I will.”

They sat quietly, without speaking, for a while. Then Kimberly spoke again. “Johann knows we cannot send him back.”

“What do you mean?”

“I could see it in his face. He knows he is stranded here.”

“One thing we must remember: just because he is from eight-hundred years in the past doesn't mean he is stupid.”

Kimberly chuckled. “I remember a very dear man teaching me that many years ago.”

“As I recall, it took some effort.”

“It would be unwise for me to argue the point.”

“That's good because you would lose.”

“Are you looking for an excuse to fight?” she asked.

He laughed. “We rarely need an excuse to fight, Precious. The reasons seem to come along regularly.”

“That is because I married an extraordinarily stubborn man.”

He didn't reply, rather just stared at her.

“What?”

He shrugged. “Oh, I don't know. You seem to have been piling up one outrageous statement after the other today.”

“What *are* we going to do about that poor man?”

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“We are going to expend a lot of time and effort in helping him adjust to this milieu. It's the only thing we can do.”

“That was a good idea to introduce him to Josiah.”

The Paladin grinned. “They were chattering like magpies when we left.”

“I worry about knowledge of Josiah getting out.”

“The AIs can bury themselves in the cloud pretty deep. There are always stories going around about rogue intelligences. So far, we have been able to play head games with anybody that got too curious.”

“What if somebody who is a better systems programmer than you gets a sniff.”

He leaned back in the seat and folded his arms. “We'll cross that bridge when we come to it. Hasn't happened so far.”

That afternoon, Johann carried the comp term back to his apartment at the Rogers residence. He had seen people using hand comms and reached the conclusion that he was talking to someone in a similar fashion. The warm, friendly voice patiently answered his questions and seemed genuinely concerned about him. The Rogers were only mildly surprised when he carried it to the dinner table.

“Johann has asked me to convey his thanks for your generous hospitality,” said the voice in the comp term.

“Tell him he is most welcome,” Sally said. “We are very sorry for the accident which brought him here.”

The AI spoke in German to Johann, who replied.

“He understands it was an accident. He is hopeful you will be able to correct the problem.”

“How much does he know?” Quintan asked.

“I have not explained in detail what happened. I am not entirely sure your team fully understands it. I see no need to confuse or frighten the man.”

“Quite right,” Sally said. “Tell him he is certainly welcome in our home. He should let us know of any needs he has.”

Johann and Josiah conversed some more.

“He asked if you could provide him some musical score paper and a stylus.”

She turned to her husband. “Quint, can you do a search and have the manufacturer create some samples for him to choose from?”

“Sure. We can do it right after dinner.”

“What is this?” Quintan asked as he looked at the dinner table.

“Bratwurst,” Sally said. “I did some research and thought maybe Johann would like this.”

“I do not think we have had this before. It does not look anything like what comes out of the machines at work.”

“For that, you can be thankful. It is a type of sausage. We have not had it at home before. I already sampled it. I think you will like it.”

Johann speared a piece of the sausage and took a bite. He nodded in approval. He spooned a pile of the fried potatoes on his plate. He pointedly ignored the broccoli.

“I see he has good taste,” Quintan said.

“Hush, Quint.”

“Daddy, you ought to try it sometime,” Lauren said.

“I *have* tried it. I do not like it. Josiah, ask Johann if he likes broccoli.”

After a rapid-fire exchange of German, the voice spoke. “He says his wife made him eat it. He otherwise would not willingly partake.”

“See?” Quintan said. “A very wise German, if I ever saw one.”

„Was?“ Johann asked.

Josiah repeated the comments to him in German. He barked a laugh. „Der weise Deutsche setzt sich nicht oft über seine Frau hinweg.“ (*The wise German does not defy his wife often.*)

Josiah repeated the comment in English, “The wise German does not defy his wife often.”

“The wise Palatine does not defy his wife at all,” Sally said.

⑨

Days stretched into weeks as the research team reviewed Ed Forsenn's experimental equipment and the mathematics behind it. Johann gradually developed some skill in speaking Anglo and could now make himself understood, although he carried the comp term everywhere and often talked to Josiah.

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Finally, the Paladin called for a general meeting of the research team. He and his wife sat at the end of the table in the conference room at the Urbana facility. The Rogers and Edgar Forsenn completed the group. The conference room was along the outer wall of the low-slung building. The windows displayed a sunny day, with a brilliant white blanket of snow covering the ground.

"Plenty cold today, if you ask me," the Paladin said to initiate the meeting.

"It's been a cold winter so far, and we are not even to Thanksgiving yet," Quintan said.

"I wonder if the climate will snap back to something warmer anytime soon," Forsenn commented.

"The climatologists are puzzled," the Paladin said. "The Solar activity has remained at historic lows for centuries. They are concerned about the ice cap moving south."

"We could walk across the roof of the world," Sally said, "even during summer. Not that I would want to, though."

The Paladin nodded. "Yes. Well, I suppose we should get down to business." He laid his comp term on the table.

"Because of the general inability of the team to arrive at any usable conclusions, I have asked for some outside help."

"But this is a top-secret project, Sir," Forsenn said.

"I think we can safely assume the ability of our consultant to keep a secret. Are you there, Josiah?"

"I am here, Scott," said the warm voice from the comp term. "I will endeavor to provide the best service to the research team."

"But that is an AI," Forsenn said. "How can we trust it to know temporal and quantum theory?"

"I think you will be surprised how much he knows," the Paladin said. "By the way, let me remind you again that Josiah's existence is a state secret. No one in this room is to discuss such anywhere but on the premises. Clear?"

"Yes, Sir," the team chorused.

"Okay. Josiah has reviewed the research data and has a few questions."

"Thank you, Scott. Dr. Forsenn, have you been able to establish causality as a result of the experiment?"

"I have not," Forsenn frowned. "It is puzzling. We have established the date of the temporal event as between 1727 and 1735. We have a historical record of the time, showing Johann as having passed away in 1750."

"So his transfer to our time has not affected history as we know it," Josiah said.

"Wait a minute," the Paladin said. "You have a historical record for Johann? Who did you drag here, anyway?"

The research team looked at each other. Finally, Quintan Rogers spoke. "Johann is a musician of some note, pardon the pun. Many records were lost during the time of troubles, but a considerable portion of his compositions have survived, as have historical records about the man."

The Paladin leaned forward. "Now you have me frightened. *Who* did you bring from the 18th century?"

"Why, Johann Bach. I thought you knew," Forsenn said.

"You brought *Bach* here?" the Paladin said. "How could you do that?"

The team looked confused. Sally finally spoke. "I am sorry, Paladin. What are you asking?"

"You brought Bach here?"

"We thought you knew that."

"I didn't know that."

"I mean," she continued, "it was a horrible thing to do to the man, but why is he significant?"

"It's Bach!" He stopped and shook his head. "Of course. It was eight-hundred years ago. You have no frame of reference here, I guess. Bach was responsible for the foundations of Western music as we know it. We still use the forms he developed. He was, or is a musical genius."

"So, we snagged somebody famous?" Sally asked.

"Oh, man!" the Paladin said. "I can't believe what we have done."

"Very well, Scott," Josiah said. "We are still faced with the causality paradox. Historical records show Johann as having lived until he died in 1750. But, we have him here, alive and breathing from fifteen years before his death."

"I still can't believe you guys brought Bach here, out of time."

"Scott," Josiah persisted, "we have not established where Johann came from."

"What do you mean?"

"The math is ambiguous."

The Paladin knocked on the table with a knuckle. "How can math be ambiguous? That doesn't make sense."

"I can answer that," Forsenn said. "We are dealing with quantum physics, not Newtonian. Time, energy, and matter can exist in several states simultaneously. I believe that Johann exists both here and in his original time. What we have done is to put a shim into the flow of time. This allowed us to hive off Johann's existence without disturbing his

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original timeline.”

“That is an attractive theory, Edgar,” Josiah said. “Unfortunately, the mathematics of causality do not allow for simultaneity in this manner.”

“That is what I have been trying to say. The mathematics of simultaneity are flawed. What we have done here proves it.”

“What are the alternatives?” the Paladin's wife asked. “Have there been any other theories?”

“May I download the equations?” Josiah asked.

“Of course,” Forsenn said. He tapped the corner of his comp term, and the three-dimensional simulacrum appeared to rise from the top of the unit. His fingers rapidly manipulated the objects floating in the air. “All right, Josiah. The path to the calculations is on my top layer. Can you grab them?”

“Yes, Edgar. I have them. I will begin an examination.”

“I am uncomfortable allowing an AI to look at these documents,” Forsenn continued.

“Josiah and I have an understanding,” the Paladin said. “You don't need to worry.”

Forsenn sat back with a pensive look on his face.

“I know you're going to worry, anyway,” the Paladin said. “We are just going to have to accept that, considering we are in unusual circumstances.”

The Paladin leaned back in his chair. “I think that is it for today, people. Josiah is going to chew over your math. If he comes up with anything, we'll get back together. Otherwise, just carry on.”

“Yes, Paladin,” they murmured.

⌚

“I thank you for your generous contribution to our school,” the minister said as he stood.

“I did not expect you to travel all the way to Chicago just to thank me, Sir,” the Paladin said. “Besides, I do not feel I should be the one you should thank.”

“We always thank God for his sustenance, but I wanted to personally thank you for allowing *Him* to use you.”

“In that case, you are welcome.”

“Several of our buildings are badly in need of repair. We have been praying about this for months.”

“I am glad I could help out,” the Paladin said.

“We would be honored if you visited and spoke to our students.”

“I will certainly keep that in mind.”

Following the meeting, the Paladin left the fiftieth-floor conference room, with its panoramic view of Chicago, and returned to his office ten floors above. His wife was waiting when he walked in.

“I do not understand why you persist in contributing to that school in the CFS, Scott. Those people are out of step.”

He stopped before the tall blond woman and grasped her hands. “I know, Precious. But they are just about the only organization I have discovered that has any kind of a link to my century.”

“A dubious link, if you ask me.”

“Besides, Precious,” he said with a grin, “they want me to visit and speak to the student body.”

“That will never happen.”

“I know, I know. Governor O'Bleck of the Carolina Free State hates my guts. Traveling there would not be wise. Besides, I suspect the Reverend Crockette really doesn't want me speaking to his students.”

“Just when I despair of your decision-making abilities, you do the right thing.”

“Thanks, I think.”

She nodded towards the desk in the expansive office. “Our friend wants to talk to you.”

Hovering over the comp term on the desk was a small, pulsating silver orb. The Paladin walked across the room to stand behind the desk.

“Okay, Josiah, I'm here. What do you have?”

“Hello, Scott. We have examined the mathematical structure constructed by Edgar Forsenn.”

A scroll winked into existence above the comp term and unrolled. Closely spaced equations streamed across the simulacrum.

“This is Dr. Forsenn's work, Scott. Notice this equation.”

A small group of symbols changed to yellow and began blinking.

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"He made a small error here," Josiah said. "That error fundamentally changed his entire construct."

The Paladin studied the glowing screen hovering above the desk. "I can follow about a third of this, Josiah. You're sure this is an error?"

"Yes, Scott. For two reasons. One – the math was clearly in error. Second – once it is corrected..."

The yellow-colored equation changed, and new symbols cascaded below it. "it perfectly illustrates the event we have observed."

"So you figured out where Bach came from?"

"We have."

The Paladin's wife walked around the desk to study the document floating in the air. "This explains what happened?"

"Yes, it does."

"So what happened?" the Paladin asked.

"Allow me to illustrate," the AI said.

The equations rolled up suddenly, reminding the Paladin of an out-of-control window shade. The device even made a flapping sound. A new schema appeared. It looked like a horizontal stack of cards.

"If you will look towards the center, Scott..." A pinpoint began blinking. "This represents the prior state just before Dr. Forsenn activated the device."

"Okay."

"Now watch the simulation."

The blinking indicator flashed, then the cards stretched away from the point, then snapped back. They oscillated for about ten seconds, looking to the Paladin like curtains in the breeze.

"What am I looking at, Josiah?"

"Dr. Forsenn did not create a temporal device, as we understand it. Rather he oriented the quantum tunnel transversely across multiple universes. The oscillation was the effect of the device on the borders between universes."

The Paladin studied the simulacrum. "Josiah... how many universes are there?"

"Unknown, Scott. The Witnesses believe there is a finite number, but that number is large."

"Scott, I am frightened," his wife said.

"And what is the effect of those oscillations?" the Paladin asked.

"Unknown, Scott. However, we speculate that the shock wave from the quantum tunnel impacted individuals in each universe. The tunnel stretched across all universes."

"Are the universes still reverberating?"

"Yes, Scott. The effects are gradually subsiding. They are already almost imperceptible."

"If your equations are correct, then it might be possible to send Bach back, right?"

"Correct, Scott. But it would be dangerous for Johann, as well as for the fabric of the universe."

"That's what I was getting at, Josiah. We don't dare attempt to send him back."

"We concur."

The Paladin continued to stare at the image projected in the air above his desk. "I need to shut down the project."

"We would so recommend," Josiah said.

"Very well, Josiah. Can you prevent the device from operating again?"

"I can."

"Okay. The first order of business is to change the mission of the lab."

"What about Johann?" the Paladin's wife asked.

"Have you said anything to him, Josiah?" the Paladin asked.

"I have not."

"All right, Precious. Let's invite him to lunch. These people are working directly for me. It's my responsibility. I'll tell him."

"That poor man."

"I guess I can empathize with him."

His wife looked at him; her eyes were full of unshed tears. "I do not believe I could sit here while you told him."

"I know. Let's send a car out for him. After he and I meet, you and I can fly down to Urbana and pull the plug."

"What will you do with the people in the lab?"

"I have some other projects in mind," the Paladin said. "I think we'll stay away from quantum tunneling for a

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while.”

“I will arrange for the meal,” she said as she turned to leave the office.

The Paladin waited for his wife to leave the room before he spoke again.

“Josiah, we must remove all traces of this project from the global net. It is just incredibly dangerous.”

“We agree, Scott. We will ensure no trace remains.”

¶¶

“Herr Paladin, zo kind of you to invite Mich.”

“Johann, I have been remiss in not doing this sooner. Your Anglo has improved.”

“Danke... er... thank you, Herr Paladin. Your friend Josiah is helpful. I have worked hard.”

“Josiah is a good teacher. He has helped me out on numerous occasions.”

“Would like to meet him.”

The Paladin inclined his head, then waved an arm towards the table. “We are using the private dining room, which is not so grandiose as the formal dining room.”

Johann looked puzzled as he silently mouthed the word *grandiose*.

“I am sorry, Johann. I should not use such words. Do you understand *pretentious*?”

“Ja. My Anna often makes that remark about our Margrave. This room is more... *natürlich*.”

“Please, be seated. I asked the cook to make something you would enjoy.”

The German eased into the chair with his back to the floor-to-ceiling windows. “Pardon, Herr Paladin. The height.”

“Oh. I am sorry.” The Paladin walked over to the corner and touched a contact. Curtains silently and swiftly slid across the windows. “I wanted to make you comfortable.”

“Thank you, Herr Paladin.”

He returned to the table and stood behind his chair with his hands on the back.

“Was your trip here pleasant?”

“It was my first time in your flying carriage. I think I enjoyed it.”

The Paladin chuckled. “Good, good. I did not know you had not flown before.”

“Many things about your land I enjoy. *Aber*, I miss my Anna.”

The Paladin looked down at the chair as he squeezed with his hands. “One of the reasons for this meeting, Johann, was that we need to talk about that.”

A white-jacketed steward wheeled the dinner into the room on a small rolling table. He silently slid a plate in front of each place at the table. The lunch consisted of sausage, potatoes, and boiled cabbage.

“This looks good,” Johann said. “What do we need to speak about?”

The Paladin grimaced and twisted his hands underneath the table. He looked up at the German.

“Let me start by telling you a little about myself. Forty years ago, I arrived here as a result of an accident. It was through a different mechanism than you experienced. But I left behind a wife and children.”

“Schade,” he said. “Uh... that is very bad. You and I are not so very different.”

“Johann... we have discovered the cause of your trip to our land.”

„Gibt es: Das ist gemütlich?“

“Not really.”

Johann had taken a bite of the potatoes and now sat the fork down again.

“Why not *really*?”

“You know you are about eight hundred years away from your home?”

“*Ja, ja*. Josiah told me.”

The Paladin paused again before continuing. “Your arrival was an unplanned effect caused by the machine Edgar Forsenn constructed.”

“Unplanned?”

“Yes. He did not intend to bring anyone here. It was an accident.”

“I had wondered if that was so,” Johann said. “Everyone was very surprised when I arrived.”

“That was, perhaps, an understatement, my friend. But, yes. Your trip to our land was an accident.”

“Surely you can send me back.”

“The machine, when it dragged you here, caused... vibrations in...” the Paladin shook his head. “I really cannot

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explain it. I barely understand it myself. Let us say that the machine could well have caused other unintended trips.”

“*Mein Gott*,” Johann breathed softly. “What will those *arme Seelen* do?”

“Johann. Sending you back is too dangerous. I cannot allow you to return. I am not sure we even *can* send you back. But I fear the consequences.”

The German picked up the sterling silver fork and studied it. He set the fork down and studied his plate. Then he slowly rose to his feet.

“I understand, Herr Paladin. I will not dispute you. I do not wish to cause distress to other travelers from a far land.”

“I am glad you understand.”

“I do *not* understand, Herr Paladin. But I accept your word. You have been honorable.”

The Paladin nodded. “Very well. We must talk about what you may do next.”

“We should talk. But not today. Can you have your magic carriage take me to my home?”

“I will do that.”

“Danke, Herr Paladin. We will talk again. Now I must speak with my Father in Heaven.”

With head bowed the German walked slowly from the room. After the door slid closed, the Paladin touched the contact to open the curtains. He stared at the Chicago skyline and the heavy air traffic which wove its way through the towers of the city. He recognized the crushing sorrow Johann experienced. He had indeed experienced it himself. The Paladin was frustrated. He knew not whether he was grieving for the German or himself. He turned around and studied the table and the plate where the steward had set out Bach's Lunch.

Author's Note: Thanks to Beejay Morgan who kindly arranged for the phrases to be translated into German.