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SF PERUSALS

Bach at Leipzig

by Itamar Moses

A Samuel French Acting Edition



SAMUELFRENCH.COM

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BACH AT LEIPZIG was first produced at the Hangar Theatre, Ithaca, NY, with direction by Kevin Moriarty, lights by Jeff Croiter, costumes by Jared Lesse, set by Matt Maraffi, sound by Sarah Pickett, and stage management by Monica Tandon. The cast was as follows:

FASCH . . . . . R. Bruce Connelly
SCHOTT . . . . . Joel Leffert
LENECK . . . . . Greg Steinbruner
STEINDORFF . . . . . Patrick Reynolds
KAUFMANN . . . . . Brian Russell
GRAUPNER . . . . . Edward Chemaly
THE GREATEST ORGANIST IN GERMANY . . . . . Joel Zumoff

CHARACTERS

JOHANN FRIEDRICH FASCH, organist, and Kapellmeister at Zerbst, fifties.

GEORG BALTHASAR SCHOTT, organist, at the Neuekirche in Leipzig, fifties.

GEORG LENCK, organist, and Kantor at Laucha, late thirties.

JOHANN MARTIN STEINDORFF, organist, and Kantor at Zwickau, twenties.

GEORG FRIEDRICH KAUFMANN, organist, and Kantor at Merseburg, fifties.

JOHANN CHRISTOPH GRAUPNER, organist, and Kapellmeister at Darmstadt, fifties.

THE GREATEST ORGANIST IN GERMANY, organist, and Kantor at Hamburg.

SETTING

The Thomaskirche, Leipzig, Germany, 1722. Later, 1750.

A NOTE ABOUT STAGING

The action of the play takes place entirely in an ante chamber adjacent to the main interior of the church. There is a large and ornate pair of double doors upstage center, leading into the church, and a few other exits, archways perhaps, some leading further into the church, and one to the outside.

A NOTE ABOUT HISTORY IN THE PLAY

Johann Kuhnau really was the organist at the Thomaskirche in Leipzig. When he died, there really was an audition to select a replacement. The play's characters really were some of the organists who received invitations. But the play is largely a work of fiction, merely inspired by the barest outline of a few real events. Only very little biographical information about Fasch, Lenck, Kaufmann and the rest was employed during the writing of this play, and the actions and characteristics ascribed to them here are, by and large, the playwright's invention.

ACT ONE

One

(*As the lights fade, the beginning of Bach's Prelude in A-Minor for organ plays, perhaps cutting off with the sound of wind, a carriage, a slamming door. At this, a man in his fifties,* **JOHANN FRIEDRICH FASCH**, *appears, alone in a pool of light, wearing a traveling cloak.*)

FASCH. Leipzig. June, 1722.

My darling Anna:

By the time you receive this letter, I will have sent it. I know that I embarked, suddenly, my sweet angel, I am sorry for it, especially so soon after the birth of our infant daughter, so soon that she does not yet have even a name. But I had no choice.

From an early age, my gingersnap, I heard everything in nature, from the squeak of wheels on a passing stagecoach, to the slap of feet into mud puddles, as melodies and harmonies, The insomnia that has plagued me since childhood is, I think, in part a result of the hum that often springs, unbidden, from my throat. As is the insomnia that now plagues *you*. Eager for the training I knew I needed, and to escape the unfortunate circumstances of my birth, I found my way here, to Leipzig, and to the man whose reputation had drawn me there: Johann Kuhnau. He held the post of Thomaskantor, presiding over both the services at the Thomaskirche, and the students at the Thomasschule, which stood across from one another on the Thomaskirchof, in the area of Leipzig honoring St. Thomas.

Recognizing my potential, Kuhnau began to give me

private lessons in his study. It was clear to me, then, how profound was his devotion to the Lutheran faith. On his walls, above his writing desk, his washbasin, *everywhere*, he had affixed scrolls bearing the sayings of Martin Luther. Above his keyboard, one, my favorite, read: "Youth should be taught this art: for it makes fine, skillful people." And indeed, it was not simply as a musician, but as a person, that Kuhnau instructed me, alternating musical lessons with religious ones. Music, Kuhnau taught me, was God's gift to us, and our only worthy way of praising God in return. And at the close of every lesson, he would say: "You, Johann, are my most cherished pupil."

But, Anna, my meadow, my lamb, as I grew older, I found it in me, as never before, to *disagree* with Kuhnau. About composition, at first, as I tired of the rigid Forms he taught me. But, soon, my queries, like our lessons, shifted from music to religion. Need our music praise God *at all*?

I wondered. Why not make it simply for each other? I found myself questioning even the most fundamental tenets of his Faith. Consubstantiation! Election! The Doctrine of Predestination itself! Each meeting would begin with humble apologies for the last, but soon would escalate to bitter argument. And, one day, when I went to his study for my lesson, bearing a *gift*, no less, that day…oh, Anna, my empath, this will break your heart… That day: there was another student in his room. A new student at his keyboard. And he said, Anna, I heard it myself, Kuhnau said to this boy: "You, Johann, are my most cherished pupil."

I dropped my gift by the door, where it shattered. It had been ridiculous in any case: a simple vase, unadorned. I left the school that very night. My teacher and I never spoke again. And my insomnia, which his devotion had quelled, returned. Then I met you, my milk-skinned moppet, and it was conquered for good. When your Doctor procured for me that mysterious powder from the East. But I remained…haunted.

Which brings me to the reason for my sudden flight. The night I left you, I received a missive. It bore the unmistakably genuine seal of the Leipzig Guild of Musicians, and was enfolded in the metal case they employ for important correspondence. Inside was a letter. Or, no, not a letter, but a piece of music, a melody that, when decoded, contained a message. "I am dying," he said. "I wish to choose a replacement. Come see me at once." Such melancholy! For here was terrible news, and yet, in the same moment, a chance, to reconcile! And more! A chance to guide Leipzig according to *my* principles! For what else could this mean? *He must have seen that he was wrong!* I pounded roadways into dust, threw coins at gatekeepers, pausing only in the courtyard itself, where, through the windows of the church, I could hear the inimitable sound of my old teacher at the organ. I mounted the steps, entered the church, and stalked the halls to the great doorway itself…

(**FASCH** *turns…*)

Two

(*Lights up on the anteroom of the Thomaskirche.*)

(*Double doors upstage center lead into the church proper. Several simple wooden benches stand against the stone walls. Another man in his fifties,* **GEORG BALTHASAR SCHOTT**, *is seated here, near the doors. A moment.*)

SCHOTT. Johann Friedrich Fasch!

FASCH. Georg Balthasar Schott.

SCHOTT. What brings you here?

FASCH. Stagecoach, primarily. And, for this last portion, my feet.

SCHOTT. Of course. And for what reason have you come?

FASCH. It is a beautiful church. One doesn't come to Leipzig without paying a visit to the Thomaskirche.

SCHOTT. Indeed. Indeed. But, no, Herr Fasch. Why are you *here* at all? In Leipzig?

FASCH. A whim, Georg. I am simply passing through. (*Beat.*) Although I might ask you the same question.

SCHOTT. You might. But it would be strange. I live here.

FASCH. No: *here*. Are you not still employed as organist at the Neuekirche? In the cobbler's district, under the bridge, across town?

SCHOTT. I am. But there is a problem with the organ at the Neuekirche.

FASCH. What's that?

SCHOTT. It is across town, under the bridge, in the cobbler's district.

FASCH. Ah.

SCHOTT. Strange time for a journey all the way from Zerbst. Travel is dangerous. War is brewing between the cities of Merseburg and Zwickau.

FASCH. The roads are quiet. Merseburg has just appointed a new Ambassador to Zwickau, to secure the peace. (*Pause.*) From the courtyard I could have sworn I heard *him* playing.

SCHOTT. So you did. He is engaged in a closed and lengthy concert for himself.

FASCH. How unusual.

SCHOTT. Not at all. It is his custom every afternoon. For hours.

FASCH. What a boon for those who live nearby! They must listen, enraptured!

SCHOTT. Indeed, they *must.* It's audible for half a mile. At the tavern across the street, the hired musicians abandon their efforts, as Kuhnau fills the rafters above their heads, and renders them obsolete.

FASCH. I hear nothing now.

SCHOTT. An acoustic anomaly. His music escapes through the stained glass on the other side of the cathedral, and those nearby are entombed in silence. But it is, as you heard, perfectly clear from a greater distance.

FASCH. (*Privately.*) Oh, yes. I remember.

SCHOTT. Of course. You were his student.

FASCH. Yes.

SCHOTT. So perhaps you are *not* simply passing through after all.

FASCH. Perhaps not simply. No. (*Pause.*) Speaking of which…

(**FASCH** *gestures for* **SCHOTT** *to let him pass.* **SCHOTT** *stares back, innocently.*)

SCHOTT. What?

FASCH. May I go?

SCHOTT. You may. It was delightful to see you.

FASCH. May I go *inside*?

SCHOTT. Oh, no, no, no! He is loath to relinquish a single moment at the instrument while he can still play!

FASCH. Of course. But how can we be sure that he plays still?

(**SCHOTT** *opens the door a crack. There is a sudden swell of pipe organ music, in mid-phrase, a rapid-fire run of high notes over low groans. He closes the door again, and the music snaps off as suddenly as it began.*)

SCHOTT. He does.

FASCH. He's…remarkable. After all these years.

SCHOTT. Yes. All these years.

FASCH. What is he, seventy-five, eighty?

SCHOTT. Eighty-one.

FASCH. Eighty-one. Remarkable. (*Pause.*) Do you think he's nearly finished?

SCHOTT. I can only hope that he is.

FASCH. Perhaps if I could just call out to him, so that he might be aware of my presence?

(**SCHOTT** *opens the door a crack. There is another swell of music, even more impressive than the first.* **FASCH** *is rendered inaudible.*)

SCHOTT. (*Over the music.*) *What!?* I'm sorry, my friend, I can't hear you!

(**FASCH** *waves at* **SCHOTT** *to close the door. He does. The music snaps off.*)

SCHOTT. You see? To make such an attempt now would do no good. You would raise your voice in greeting, and be drowned out by the many other voices under his command. You are too cavalier, Herr Fasch. It is a lucky thing that I am here, as a bulwark. To guard him.

FASCH. Let me pass.

SCHOTT. No.

FASCH. It is not your place to forbid my entrance.

SCHOTT. Nor is it yours to enter. Given your betrayal of all that he holds dear.

FASCH. I…beg your pardon?

SCHOTT. It is not mine you ought to beg. Your deviation from the good Lutheranism practiced by great men like Herr Kuhnau has thrown your congregation into utter disarray.

FASCH. I am beloved in Zerbst.

SCHOTT. I think not, Johann.

FASCH. I assure you, Georg. You have confused me with another musician.

SCHOTT. That seems unlikely.

FASCH. It is *very* likely. Half the musicians in Germany are called Johann. The other half are called Georg. It is a blessing, Balthasar, that we all have middle names with which to distinguish ourselves from one another.

SCHOTT. I suppose, Friedrich, that it is.

FASCH. I shall wait until he emerges. Out of respect for *him.*

SCHOTT. Very wise.

FASCH. Do you think we might listen, from the threshold, as he plays?

SCHOTT. I suppose.

FASCH. You don't think he'll mind?

SCHOTT. I don't think he'll notice.

(**SCHOTT** *opens the doors. The music flares.* **FASCH** *and* **SCHOTT** *stand in the open doorway, watching. At its peak, the music cuts off, abruptly. Then it starts again, spasmodically. Then there is a thump, and a blare of adjacent low notes, as though the organist has pressed his head against the bottom of the keyboard and left it there. Which, judging from their reaction, is precisely what has happened. The drone sustains.*)

(**FASCH** *runs inside.* **SCHOTT** *backs away from the door, stunned.* **FASCH** *emerges.*)

FASCH. There are clergy in the courtyard. Get them. (*Pause.*) *Get them!*

SCHOTT. Yes. Yes. Right away.

(**SCHOTT** *runs off, and can be heard calling:*)

SCHOTT. (*Off.*) Help! *Help! We need help!*

(**FASCH** *turns out, into a pool of light. The drone sustains quietly underneath.*)

FASCH. But, Anna. The instrument he played is all that I have left of him now. I had hoped to return to you right away, my lily, my lake, but that is not possible. For something awful has occurred.

I'll write again, when I have time.

Yours, Johann.

(**FASCH** *releases a "pigeon" and watches it ascend…the sound of wings…wind…*)

(*Blackout.*)

Three

(**GEORG LENCK**, *late thirties, alone in a pool of light.*)

LENCK. Leipzig. June, 1722.

My dear Catherina:

I have arrived safely, and in time, having arranged passage with a gentlemen who allowed me to accompany his carriage. Because he did not know I was there. Clinging to the underside of it. As I am fond of saying: I, Georg Lenck, am so poor that I cannot afford even a middle name with which to distinguish myself from other Georgs. But that, after all, is why I've come. For this memorial is to be hosted by the Leipzig Council itself, the very men charged with selecting Kuhnau's replacement. Here I will reverse my fortunes at last!

I have promised this before, it's true. As when I had you defraud your parents by feigning an expensive illness called Bogus Fever. I apologize again for discounting your warnings regarding your father's familiarity with

medicine. But, after all, you were feverish. In any case, here is a chance for real glory: a post in Leipzig! (*Beat.*) I have promised that I could win a post in Leipzig before, it's true. When I auditioned at a church surrounded by cobblers, and, for some reason, under a bridge. But I faced a rival who was insurmountable. Once he blackmailed me with my history of feigning expensive illnesses.

This time I have left no room for error. I come bearing dozens of letters in praise of my musical talent. And, thanks to my adept calligraphy, each is in a different script! And each signed by an entirely fictitious Duke! This is indeed a happy day…

(**LENCK** *turns. Lights up on the anteroom.* **FASCH** *and* **SCHOTT** *are here.* **LENCK** *is sobbing on* **FASCH***'S shoulder.* **FASCH** *comforts him.*)

FASCH. Georg Lenck. How wonderful of you to come.

LENCK. There was no question about it, Herr Fasch. The moment I received the messenger pigeon bearing news of his demise, I knew that I would feel incomplete if I let him pass without paying tribute.

FASCH. I trust that the trip from Laucha was uneventful.

LENCK. I wish it had been. A crazed bandit accosted me on the road: dirty rags, a gleaming sword, a hood concealing his face. He tried to steal my luggage.

FASCH. No.

LENCK. Oh yes.

FASCH. It must have been dreadful.

LENCK. No, it is very attractive, which is no doubt why he wished to steal it.

FASCH. Well, we are very sorry to hear it.

SCHOTT. Though there are things we'd be sorrier to hear. Your music, for example.

LENCK. Excuse me?

SCHOTT. For example, he might have stolen your music.

LENCK. Fear not. To prevent just such a calamity, I keep my scores inside my cloak, strapped to my very body. Hello, Herr Schott.

SCHOTT. Lenck.

(**SCHOTT** *and* **LENCK** *shake hands.*)

LENCK. How is the Neuekirche?

SCHOTT. Excellent. How is your health?

LENCK. At risk. Like yours.

SCHOTT. What?

LENCK. The countryside is in utter disarray. *War* is brewing.

FASCH. Has not Merseburg just appointed a new Ambassador to Zwickau to secure the peace?

LENCK. No: they have appointed a new Ambassador to *fail* to secure the peace.

FASCH. Not a skilled diplomat?

LENCK. The opposite: a musician.

SCHOTT. Did you take my ring?

LENCK. What? Oh. Yes. (*He returns a ring he obtained during the handshake.*) A keyboardist's fingers. If I don't keep them busy, they busy themselves.

So! By the time word of Kuhnau's death reached me, rumor held that he had collapsed while performing.

FASCH. The deacons wouldn't allow us to move him until the doctor arrived. But by then, of course, it was too late.

LENCK. It's true?

FASCH. Yes. His music and his life, ending together, without the benefit of a cadence. A sudden and final interruption, of both the man and his art.

SCHOTT. It was dramatic in the extreme.

LENCK. The moment must have been.

SCHOTT. No, the noise. His head depressed the keys. We had to listen to those sustained notes for half an hour. The man performed his own dirge with his face.

LENCK. Sounds awful.

SCHOTT. It certainly did. Kuhnau's features were so smooth, you see, it was hideously dissonant. If he'd had a sharper nose, narrower cheekbones –

FASCH. Yes, Herr Schott, I'm sure that when you expire face-first into a keyboard, your hawk-like countenance will produce a glorious fugue.

SCHOTT. Thirds, at least. It might have been thirds.

LENCK. (*Moving towards the doors.*) The service is inside?

SCHOTT. No.

FASCH. Only the body.

LENCK. (*Beat.*) I'm sorry, so: he's all *alone*?

FASCH. I… (*Beat.*) What do you mean?

SCHOTT. The official memorial is to take place later on. For directly concerned parties only.

FASCH. Ah, yes. Music. Eulogies. Food and Drink.

SCHOTT. Prayer.

LENCK. And will you both attend?

FASCH. I was his most cherished pupil. And he: my only teacher.

LENCK. (*To* **SCHOTT**.) And yours as well? You being a native of the city?

SCHOTT. As it happens, no. I chose, instead, to learn music from my father. But we were colleagues, of course. Peers.

LENCK. Perhaps I will remain as well. For the food and the drink. After, of course, paying private homage now. He won't wait forever!

FASCH. Quite.

SCHOTT. Although, in fact, he will.

(**LENCK** *opens the doors. Faint, sad organ music floats out.*)

LENCK. Who do you suppose is playing? Quite an honor, to accompany Kuhnau's…final public appearance.

SCHOTT. No one even asked me.

FASCH. Nor me.

LENCK. Well. Perhaps a harpsichordist is stretching.

(**FASCH** *and* **SCHOTT** *precede* **LENCK** *through the doors.* **LENCK** *claps* **SCHOTT** *on the shoulder as he passes, skillfully removing a gold chain from* **SCHOTT'S** *neck. He turns out, into a pool of light, less sure of himself now.*)

LENCK. Catherina, things are on the turn. I promise you. And this time, I really mean it. I'll write again, when I have time.

Yours, Georg.

(**LENCK** *releases a pigeon…*)

(*Blackout.*)

Four And Five

(*Two men, in separate pools of light:* **GEORG FRIEDRICH KAUFMANN**, *fifties, and* **JOHANN MARTIN STEINDORFF**, *twenties.*)

KAUF. Leipzig.

STEIND. June, 1722.

KAUF. My dearest Gisela:

I hope this letter finds you well, and that you do not despise me for leaving you all alone, with our fair city on the brink of war, and only your gardener, valet, and footman to keep you company. I will try not to stay away long, though the footman especially has assured me that you would be in good hands. And, though circumstances in Merseburg are precarious, my hope is to prevent bloodshed there, even while in attendance here.

STEIND. My dearest Susanne: (*Beat.*) No. My darling Henrietta: (*Beat.*) No, no. Maria, Magdalena, and Margaret, my minxes: (*Beat. Then, soberly:*) My dear father:

Thank you, once again, for this chance at glory. I shall bring honor to all Zwickau. As you command.

(*Lights up on the anteroom.* **KAUFMANN** *and* **STEINDORFF** *turn in.*)

KAUF. Truly, Johann, you must reconsider.

STEIND. I'm sorry, Georg, I cannot.

KAUF. Our presence here together is surely an opportunity! On your soil, and on ours, negotiations have failed. Where better to make one last attempt than on the neutral ground of Leipzig?

STEIND. Herr Kaufmann. I know that you take seriously your recent appointment as Merseburg's Ambassador. But *I* am here solely in my capacity as a musician. I am not empowered to negotiate.

KAUF. Yours is the most powerful family in Zwickau, Herr Steindorff. That carries responsibilities you cannot avoid.

STEIND. (*Quietly.*) Yes. I know it. (*Beat.*) But, as I'd very much like to attend this Memorial *before* –

KAUF. Martin, please. My people do not want a war.

STEIND. They ought to have considered that before they began bombarding Zwickau with missives insulting my father.

KAUF. I beg your pardon. Those came in response to slanderous epistles from *your* city insulting our Prince. Furthermore, from what I have seen, *all* of the letters, from *both* sides, are signed by entirely fictitious Dukes! Have you considered that we may be the victims of a conspiracy by some tiny warmongering faction?

STEIND. No. For each letter is in a different script.

KAUF. Perhaps it is the work of a single adept calligraphist!

STEIND. Ridiculous. And, whether the letters are genuine or not, the rift they describe is all too real.

KAUF. Both our cities are Lutheran!

STEIND. Yes, but *ours* is determined to remain that way. Your Prince allows bastardized cults to flourish! The Calvinists! The Pietists! All manner of unacceptable distinct sects! There is no hope of reconciliation.

KAUF. Then why have I repeatedly been invited to stay as a guest on your family's estate?

STEIND. Your understanding of politics is as nuanced as your music.

KAUF. Why thank you!

STEIND. A half-hearted show at diplomacy is the final step towards open war.

KAUF. Your father is a lover of music, is he not?

STEIND. I… What of it?

KAUF. I heard that, once, there was an organist who owed him an *enormous* sum, but so taken was he with the man's skill at the keyboard that he never collected the debt.

STEIND. Yes. He refuses to change his mind. What's your point?

KAUF. Think! *That* is what unites us! Our Art! Our Theatre! Our Music! *Culture*, Steindorff! That is, finally, in the end, all that distinguishes us –

STEIND. (*Wearily.*) From the animals, yes.

KAUF. No! From the English!

STEIND. What?

KAUF. From the Italians! From the rest of Europe!

STEIND. (*Beat.*) German Culture is all that distinguishes us from non-Germans.

KAUF. Yes! And I propose a renewed commitment to our common Germanity! These sects are not irreconcilable! For they are not so distinct after all!

STEIND. They are irreconcilable because they are almost exactly the same. The Doctrine of Predestination is the cornerstone of them all. But we Lutherans can accept the notion that an Elect few are Predestined for Paradise only if it comes with the private understanding that *all* of us are included. The Calvinists have made the small mistake of taking the same religion and imposing actual *standards*. Where they reign, they ban song, and *dance*, and all forms of *expressing* the very Culture *you* so revere. The strictures they impose close like a vise from without! Limiting all freedom! Meanwhile, sprouting like weeds from within, the Pietists embrace an *individual* spirituality that frees them from all limits! Both are disaster.

KAUF. You simply parrot your father's rhetoric, Martin. And *he* longs for a time that may never return.

STEIND. Is that so?

KAUF. Yes. The very beginning of religion. When all of us were simply Lutheran.

STEIND. (*Beat.*) I'm going inside.

(**LENCK** *enters, followed by* **FASCH**.)

LENCK. We'll join you.

KAUF. Wonderful!

STEIND. Ah. The Insufficient Prince.

LENCK. Shouldn't you be opportunistically performing?

FASCH. Steindorff played during the viewing of the body.

KAUF. How marvelous!

STEIND. Thank you. I do believe that I was.

KAUF. I do not know that I have *ever* been among so very many fine composers!

(**SCHOTT** *enters. He takes in the occupants of the room.*)

SCHOTT. Oh my dear god.

FASCH. Good morning, Balthasar.

SCHOTT. Yes we'll see. Gentlemen! Welcome to Leipzig! I am happy that you all have been so warmly received by our City.

STEIND. Hardly. When I arrived, a wild brigand of some sort leapt from the bushes and attacked me on the road, near the gates.

LENCK. Did he wear nothing but rags, and a hood, and wave about a sword?

STEIND. The very one! I've never been more convinced of the wisdom of tucking my musical scores into the soles of my boots.

(*During this,* **SCHOTT** *has moved to stand between the others and the door.*)

SCHOTT. But…before we go inside…

FASCH. Oh, honestly, have you an *obsession* with blocking this doorway?

SCHOTT. You misunderstand. In fact, Fasch, I wish to… (*Generally.*) Firstly, in the sight of those gathered, composers all, I am sorry if, in my protective zeal, I prevented you from speaking to your teacher, one last time.

FASCH. Well. Well. I do appreciate it. In fact, perhaps I should apologize for my behavior during that encounter as well.

SCHOTT. Accepted.

FASCH. All that remains now is to ensure that his legacy is carried on as he would have wished.

SCHOTT. Yes! My feelings exactly! Perhaps, together, we can bring that about.

FASCH. (*Offering his hand.*) Yes! Yes, to ensure that German music –

SCHOTT. (*Taking it.*) – remains exactly the same!

FASCH. Yes. What?

STEIND. Touching.

LENCK. Beautiful. Let's go in.

FASCH. (*Blocking the door.*) Just a moment. Again. I apologize. However. He would have wanted nothing of the kind.

SCHOTT. I beg your pardon. But I spoke to him daily for half my life.

FASCH. And, begging yours, let me suggest that I think perhaps he altered in his final days.

SCHOTT. I am so sorry. But why on earth do you think that?

FASCH. He wanted music to survive. And would never have robbed it of the one thing it requires in order to do so.

SCHOTT. And what is that, pray tell?

FASCH. Innovation!

SCHOTT. God forbid. Kuhnau prized good craftsmanship, yes, but never *innovation*.

FASCH. Only because he often mistook innovation for poor craftsmanship.

KAUF. Gentlemen, gentlemen! Forgive me, but: is it possible that he might have agreed with you both?

STEIND. He does this. It's very annoying.

KAUF. I'm *asking*. It is my habit to learn all I can about the biographies of the musicians I admire.

SCHOTT. Why should we obey the shifting fashions of the day? Or, worse, *set* them!

FASCH. In the music! Only in the music, Herr Schott!

SCHOTT. But when you deny the musical principles laid down by our predecessors you risk denying their religious ones as well.

FASCH. That is preposterous! New music might, in fact, *reach* those who do not *like* the work of our predecessors. Or such would be the intent.

SCHOTT. I am not comforted, Friedrich, for intent is not the issue.

KAUF. Me?

FASCH. My middle name is also Friedrich.

KAUF. How strangely inconvenient.

LENCK. Is this going to go on much longer?

STEIND. Yes, the Memorial won't wait forever.

LENCK. Although, in fact… (*Beat.*) No, he's right, it won't.

(**FASCH** *and* **SCHOTT** *block the doors together.*)

FASCH, SCHOTT. Gentlemen!

FASCH. This should be of grave concern to you all.

SCHOTT. Indeed it should.

(*They turn back to one another.*)

FASCH. Martin Luther did not nail his ninety-five theses to the great doors at Wittenberg only to have *you* rid the world of music.

SCHOTT. Nor did he only to have *you* rid it of God! (*Beat.*) When the theme rises in a joyful figuration, it must be because the congregation, at that moment, sings of an Angel's joy, at the birth of our Lord. If the melody grows morose, it is at the turn of the story to Mary's grief as Christ lay dying, or because the word "sin" or "death" has cropped up in the text. And if we abandon these rules, we will write music that brings the heart to *any* joy, or to joy at *anything*. To joy without God.

FASCH. *You sound just like him.*

SCHOTT. Why thank you!

FASCH. *Individuals* gravitate towards individual expressions of faith.

SCHOTT. (*With contempt.*) So. You are a Pietist.

FASCH. My point exactly! Why must everything have a *name*?

SCHOTT. So that we know which houses to burn.

FASCH. If a man feels his connection to the Eternal through pure music that brings pure feeling then it is the godliness *in it* that matters! Not that someone sings the word "God"! Form is an illusion! A fragile vase no sooner questioned than shattered! Why insist that *our* rules harden into permanence when no others ever have?

SCHOTT. *Because we got them right!*

FASCH. *But when you give people the choice* –

SCHOTT. But Fasch! It is *choice* that is the illusion! Life, like music, *involves* choice *only* on the part of the Creator! Indeed: that was the *entire purpose* of the Reformation!

FASCH. What.

SCHOTT. The Doctrine of Predestination!

FASCH. Predestination is nonsense! It renders all our actions meaningless! The gates of heaven do not open at the capricious behest of some unseen hand! No! We seize the handle ourselves!

(*The escalation has been steady. Now, everyone stares at* **FASCH**. *A long moment.*)

SCHOTT. So. It is not *only* music you wish to alter. After all. (*Pause.*) And so what would become of the flock you'd lead as Kuhnau's successor?

FASCH. Well, I… (*Long pause.*) I am not Kuhnau's successor.

SCHOTT. *Ah.* But that is why you are here. Is it not? (*Generally.*) That is why *all* of you are here? Not to *honor* the man, but to *replace* him?

FASCH. Someone must.

SCHOTT. *And clearly it must not be you.* Mysticism is not faith! We are not meant to experience *pure feeling!* This is not Italy! *Would you have us, as they do, drive our congregants into an unending sensual frenzy?*

LENCK. Which way to Italy?

SCHOTT. *This is not a joke!*

LENCK. Isn't it? This impassioned display? What is its purpose? Other than to embarrass my friend. Why for our benefit? It certainly isn't very interesting to watch. Nothing is at stake here. The power to settle this lies on the other side of those doors. And it will be settled not by debate but by audition. And when we last met you did not hesitate to employ what leverage you had. So why are *you* here, Schott? Perhaps to use your native's knowledge of the Council to ply them now?

STEIND. Leave him, Lenck.

LENCK. (*Rounding on* **STEINDORFF**.) Or no! Forge an agreement with Steindorff to pool your knowledge with his family's resources?

STEIND. I am insulted.

LENCK. I am insulting you.

SCHOTT. *You see!?* Germany is in utter disarray. Scattered bands of Dukes and Princes, sprouting like weeds, and turning on one other! And all the while the Catholics close like a vise from without! Risen from the Mediterranean, an Italian ogre rattles the gates, roaring Vivaldi! To the southwest are poised a gaggle of French dances! And across the water, our own Georg Friedrich produces opera after opera for the English!

KAUF. I am not across any water.

FASCH. He means Handel. Whose name also begins with Georg Friedrich.

KAUF. How –

SCHOTT. And do not think that this threat is confined to music or to politics. French Cathedrals resplendent with gold and jewels! Drug-addled Italians painting the Son of God in whore's colors as some twisted

grotesque! I do not know what they will call this ignominious new age, but it runs entirely *counter* to the spirit of the Reformation.

But. Just as this can infect our music, so too can our music beat it back. And Leipzig shall be our bulwark. But who among *you* is *worthy* to lead this great defense? Who will slay the ogre, crush the dancers, and preserve the old way, anew? *Who will stand upon our battlements and lead us?*

(**SCHOTT** *turns away from the others, brusquely, and opens the doors. Music, once again, floats out. A moment.*)

SCHOTT. It's all right. A cat has escaped and is walking across the keyboard.

(**SCHOTT** *goes inside.*)

KAUF. I'm sorry. They're holding auditions for Kuhnau's post?

(**FASCH** *has removed a vial of white powder from his coat, pinches a bit between his fingers, and inhales it.*)

STEIND. (*Intrigued.*) What is that, Fasch?

FASCH. It's medicinal. (*Beat.*) Gentlemen, shall we?

(*The lights shift.* **KAUFMANN** *and* **STEINDORFF** *turn out together.*)

STEIND. And now, father, it is time.

KAUF. I'll write again, Gisela, when I have time.

STEIND. Yours, Johann.

KAUF. Yours, Georg.

(**STEINDORFF** *and* **KAUFMANN** *release pigeons together…two sets of wings…*)

(*Blackout.*)

Six

(*A man in his fifties,* **JOHANN CHRISTOPH GRAUPNER,** *alone, in a pool of light. He wears a traveling cloak.*)

GRAUP. Leipzig. June. 1722.

Doctor Schultz:

Throughout my journey from Darmstadt, I spoke aloud to myself the optimistic incantations you suggested. "I am important to those who are important to me." And: "I am beloved by those whose love matters." But they were empty in my mouth, and, at last, after hundreds of repetitions, the carriage driver begged me to be quiet.

I know, and you have repeatedly assured me, that I, Johann Christoph Graupner, ought to count myself lucky to have such a name and reputation. Which is to say: a name so recognizable that many people think they have heard of me, without being quite sure, and a reputation as the Second Greatest Organist in Germany. But my hope is that here, at last, it shall be different. That I shall surpass my nemesis, and be the most revered of all. My devotion to Calvinism allows me to accept nothing less.

To that end, I arranged my audition through letters, and contrived to delay my arrival until the day before the auditions were to begin, to build the anticipatory dread of the others, who would no doubt have noticed my conspicuous absence, and superstitiously avoided even the mention of my name. So that I would appear first as a more shadowy and menacing figure, I tarried near the gates until dark. At which point, I was attacked by a daft highwayman, who emerged from the foliage. It is for this very reason that, when I travel, I attach my scores to the flesh of my thighs with surgical thread.

In any event, once inside the gates, I descended upon the Thomaskirchof, seized a clergyman, and asked where I might find the others. Learning they'd taken

quarters in the Church itself, I mounted the steps, wrapped in my most impressive cloak, and lurked just outside the antechamber until I heard voices. I then pounded on the door, so that the echoing crashes might silence their conversation and better prepare them to witness their approaching doom…

(*Lights up on the antechamber, as* **GRAUPNER** *sweeps triumphantly into it. There is no one else into the room.*)

GRAUP. Behold! (*Beat.*) Damn.

(**GRAUPNER** *hefts his luggage, and stalks off, deeper into the church.* **STEINDORFF** *enters, from another direction, holding a note. He is agitated. Seeing no one, he looks off in several directions. He rereads the note.* **SCHOTT** *enters. A moment.*)

STEIND. What is the meaning of this? A note, nailed to my door –

SCHOTT. Yes, Herr Steindorff, I was hoping to have a word.

STEIND. (*Thoughtfully.*) "Cantankerous."

SCHOTT. I was hoping to have a word with *you.*

STEIND. Be my guest. But I am not so easy to describe in a word as you are.

SCHOTT. I wish to discuss our agreement.

STEIND. I don't. I don't wish to be seen with you at all. The others could walk in at any moment.

SCHOTT. Fear not. They've all gone to the tavern across the street.

STEIND. Even so. When the Council awards me the post tomorrow the choice must appear untainted. And, in return for your aid, you will receive what you were promised: dominion over the students at the Thomasschule. There is nothing to discuss.

SCHOTT. But, oh: there is.

(**SCHOTT** *produces a letter from his coat.*)

STEIND. What's that?

SCHOTT. I have a younger brother in Zwickau. Perhaps you know him? Johann?

STEIND. Perhaps. What is his name?

SCHOTT. That *is* his name.

STEIND. Oh! I thought –

SCHOTT. Yes. He is the sub-Deacon at your church.

STEIND. What does he do there?

SCHOTT. He administers to the sick and the poor.

STEIND. Then, no. I do not know him.

SCHOTT. Very well. But he knows you. He has seen you, after your performances on Sundays, stealing into the choir balcony.

STEIND. It's true. I go there when I wish to feel closer to God.

SCHOTT. With a young lady.

STEIND. She wishes to feel closer to God as well.

SCHOTT. I am sure. But which one?

STEIND. (*Perplexed.*) Which God?

SCHOTT. No, which lady? On ordinary Sundays, it is Henrietta. On Festival Sundays, it is Susanne. And on Feast Days, a Trinity! Maria, Magdalena, *and* Margaret!

STEIND. (*Incredulous.*) What sort of Lutheranism does your brother practice?

SCHOTT. Highly observant.

STEIND. No doubt.

SCHOTT. In fact, most egregiously of all, it seems the newly appointed Ambassador of Merseburg has *also* been your victim!

STEIND. (*Outraged.*) He has not!

SCHOTT. (*Patiently.*) In that you have dallied with his wife.

STEIND. Oh, yes, I see.

SCHOTT. I hold here a letter detailing these transgressions. And I am prepared to address copies to all who might find it of interest.

STEIND. Then I will have it dismissed as a forgery.

SCHOTT. It bears the unmistakably genuine seal of the Leipzig Guild of Musicians.

STEIND. Then I shall blame the interference of a mischievous courier.

SCHOTT. I will enfold it in the metal case we employ for important correspondence.

STEIND. But you are a Lutheran! Blackmail violates your principles!

SCHOTT. And lechery, yours. Punishing the latter seems to necessitate the former. For you, too, are a Lutheran.

STEIND. Exactly! Thus: any sinful actions on my part have been Predestined by God himself at the beginning of time! I had no choice!

SCHOTT. I…! Predestination is not an *excuse* to act *badly*! On the contrary: we *recognize* the Elect by their good actions!

STEIND. Balthasar: perhaps you yourself seldom enjoy the company of a woman. If so, *I* can arrange for you a *most* pliant –

SCHOTT. I seldom enjoy the company of a woman because my wife is dead. Taken in childbirth, along with our first child. (*He turns to go.*) Consider this divine judgment, Martin. For your crimes.

STEIND. Herr Schott. *Please.*

SCHOTT. I have no choice. (*Pause.*) Unless…

STEIND. Unless?

SCHOTT. Leave Leipzig.

(**STEINDORFF** *sits, defeated. Then, he begins to laugh.*)

SCHOTT. *Laughter,* Steindorff?

STEIND. My father embarked on this collusion because he saw in you a kindred spirit. One who recognized the threat to our faith and hoped to keep this post in our hands. But you are not so righteous as you pretend.

SCHOTT. Oh?

STEIND. No: you are nothing but a petty malcontent salving his own wounds. Despite the way you have *anointed* yourself Kuhnau's guardian, in *fact*: he *despised* you.

SCHOTT. What do you mean? We were *peers*, colleagues –

STEIND. Yes, so long as you remain under the bridge, in the cobbler's district –

SCHOTT. I love the Neuekirche!

STEIND. Even when you were a boy! A native of Leipzig! A musician! And yet never even admitted to the Thomasschule!

SCHOTT. I never applied!

STEIND. And if I abandon my claim? What then? You cannot sway the Council on your own. Your knowledge of them was *useless* until we provided our resources! Some require bribes, you said, and *we* supplied them! Some seek to divine Kuhnau's final wishes, you said, and *we* confirmed that he left none! Some covet the most famous name, you said, and *we* persuaded Hamburg to double the salary of its Kappelmeister, to keep him there!

SCHOTT. And so: the Greatest Organist in Germany is conspicuously absent. My devotion to Kuhnau is well known. I placed your bribes. Do you see? The outcome is inevitable. Goodbye, Martin.

(**SCHOTT** *walks away.*)

STEIND. (*Desperately.*) Once, among the peasants on my father's land, there was a wheelwright. A rumor in our house held that his eldest son was a bastard Steindorff.

SCHOTT. (*Beat.*) What on *earth* are you talking about?

STEIND. I asked my father: could we not take the boy in? My father thought me soft. Unworthy of the Steindorff name. He *banished* this wheelwright. Forced him to uproot his family. To *show* me. You see?

SCHOTT. Is that true?

STEIND. Almost heartbreaking, isn't it?

SCHOTT. Yes. Almost.

STEIND. Though I'd willingly trade lives with that boy now. (*Beat.*) But this post. This post. Herr Schott, is my opportunity to *prove* that I… (*Pause.*) Your letter may or may not have its intended effect. But if I simply leave, as you ask, the result is a certainty: never again will I be welcome in his house.

SCHOTT. Nor will you if you disgrace it. (*Beat.*) I only mean: you may try to earn his name and sully it instead. Which prospect frightens you more?

(*Pause.* **STEINDORFF** *simply looks at* **SCHOTT**.)

SCHOTT. So be it. I will release the bird tonight.

STEIND. I was wrong.

SCHOTT. What about?

STEIND. Cantankerous is not strong enough. Not at all.

(*The two men look up towards a sudden bustle of entrance.* **LENCK**, **FASCH**, *and* **KAUFMANN** *hurry into the room.*)

LENCK. Gentlemen! Here you are!

SCHOTT. Here we are.

FASCH. (*To* **STEINDORFF** *and* **SCHOTT**.) My friends, we thought you might like to join us.

LENCK. I've brought cards. We are all going to gamble.

FASCH. We are not.

SCHOTT. (*With a glance at* **STEINDORFF**.) Yes we are. All of us.

LENCK. There, you see? Splendid!

KAUF. Herr Schott, I was astonished to discover that there is a tavern across the street from This Church.

LENCK. Kaufmann, there is a tavern across from the Badenkirche in Merseburg!

KAUF. Oh, no. It *looks* like a tavern, but it is, in fact, a repair shop for musical instruments. There were a number of disagreements between myself and my musicians on

the subject, but it turns out that they go there, you see, to have their strings tightened…when the tuning…

LENCK. They told you it was a *music* shop? What's it called?

KAUF. The…ah… (*Pause.*) The Wench and Swine.

LENCK. Who did you think the Wench and the Swine *were*?

KAUF. The, the *owners*. A husband and wife who operate the business together, with two separate workshops, they told me, to complete repairs more quickly! He works downstairs, and she upstairs, with different…specialties…oh *god*…

SCHOTT. (*With a look back at* **STEINDORFF**.) Upstairs at our tavern, Herr Kaufmann, there is nothing but a pigeon loft.

FASCH. How do the musicians play afterwards?

KAUF. *Better*, actually.

FASCH. Better how?

KAUF. With less urgency.

(**SCHOTT**, **FASCH**, *and* **KAUFMANN** *are gone, these last remarks fading.* **STEINDORFF** *lingers, lost in thought.* **LENCK**, *who trails a bit behind the departing throng, turns back towards him.*)

LENCK. Come along, Steindorff. I have prepared a mug especially for you.

STEIND. Herr Lenck? May I have a moment?

LENCK. You may. But do not dally long.

STEIND. May I have a moment with *you?*

LENCK. Ah. Well. To take your own moments is your prerogative, but to lay claim to mine as well strikes me as greedy.

STEIND. Nevertheless.

LENCK. (*A slight bow.*) I am at your service.

STEIND. I wish to discuss your debt.

LENCK. (*Beat.*) You will have to be far, far more specific. I owe more than one. Forgive me.

STEIND. If I were to forgive you, you would owe one less. I refer to the debt you owe my father.

LENCK. Which one?

STEIND. (*Perplexed.*) Which father?

LENCK. No, which debt? I have admired him for so long, that I am indebted to him for many things: his wisdom, his goodness, his upright –

STEIND. Your monetary debt.

LENCK. Ah.

STEIND. Incurred over the course of an ill-fated night of card-playing at his estate.

LENCK. This *is* beginning to sound familiar.

STEIND. In the amount of four-hundred thirty florins, eighteen groschen, and nine pfennig –

LENCK. Yes –

STEIND. – and also several horses and oxen.

LENCK. Yes, yes, my memory has been sufficiently refreshed. What of it?

STEIND. He wants it repaid.

LENCK. But…He said he was so taken with my skill at the keyboard that he –

STEIND. (*Lying.*) He changed his mind.

LENCK. Your father well understands my circumstances.

STEIND. Indeed he does. More than once, he has remarked: "Georg Lenck is so poor that he cannot even afford a middle name, with which – "

LENCK. Ah. He has stolen my joke. In fact, each of us now owes the other. Perhaps we ought simply to cancel *both* debts.

STEIND. My father wants his money.

LENCK. He assured me that I would have *years.*

STEIND. You *have* had years.

LENCK. Yes, but I assumed he meant *more* years.

STEIND. No. And if you are unable to pay, he will have no choice…but to imprison you.

LENCK. I see. Or?

STEIND. (*Beat.*) He will imprison you.

LENCK. Well, that's hardly a *choice* at all, is it?

STEIND. What shall I tell him?

LENCK. Tell him…Tell him that he needn't worry. For I am soon to marry into a wealthy family, and that if he gives me only a *little more time* –

STEIND. Ah. Do you refer to Catherina Kirkendale?

LENCK. I…Why yes, how – ?

STEIND. I have an uncle in Laucha. A Philosopher. Perhaps you know him? Georg?

LENCK. Perhaps. What is his name?

STEIND. (*Beat.*) In any event, he assures me that you are in no way eligible to marry Fraulein Kirkendale; that, in fact, your presence in her chambers is the scandal of the town; and that, most damningly of all, upon each visit from her aging parents, she forces you to adopt a masquerade wherein you disguise yourself as a nurse-maid called Bodenschatz.

LENCK. (*Incredulously.*) What sort of Philosophy is it that your uncle practices?

STEIND. Morally relativistic.

LENCK. No doubt.

STEIND. If you are unable to repay with coins, you can do so with labor. Yes, several years of indentured servitude on my father's land should –

LENCK. *No!* (*Pause.*) Martin. *Please.*

STEIND. I have no choice. (*Pause.*) Unless…

LENCK. Unless?

STEIND. Leave Leipzig.

(**LENCK** *sits, defeated. Then, he begins to laugh.*)

STEIND. (*Quickly, wearily.*) Yes, yes, I am not so righteous as I pretend, and so on.

LENCK. (*Beat.*) What?

STEIND. And when you go, there is one *further* thing you must do for me. (*Correcting:*) For *him.*

LENCK. What's that?

STEIND. Circumstances in Zwickau are precarious. As I am sure you are aware.

LENCK. Of what?

STEIND. That there is a war brewing.

LENCK. (*Beat.*) Is there? I had no idea.

STEIND. Pushed to the brink by a heated exchange of provocative letters.

LENCK. A…heated exchange of provocative letters?

STEIND. Some of which publicize claims about my family as outlandish as they are damaging. Why, some of these so-called revelations even involve myself!

LENCK. (*Perplexed.*) No they don't. (*Then, quickly, covering:*) Do they?

STEIND. Yes. And *you* must rob these letters of their power!

LENCK. How?

STEIND. You will announce to all that *you* are their author.

LENCK. (*Beat.*) Me? Of…all those letters? But…how on earth is that possible?

STEIND. I don't know. Claim to be an adept calligraphist.

LENCK. Ridiculous. And why would I do such a thing?

STEIND. Spin a heartbreaking tale regarding some callous lord of one city or the other who destroyed your family when you were a child.

LENCK. And even if I succeed! I'll have evaded your father's anger and replaced it with the combined wrath of two armies girded for battle who would turn on *me* instead of one another! But this post! This post, Herr Steindorff, is my opportunity to, to *fling off* the nursemaid's bonnet, yes, that is the mark of my low station, to show myself…to show *her*… (*Pause.*) You have no idea what it is like to be without what you have. But do not think it is deserved. It is nothing more than fortunate birth. So tell me: what man is less deserving of victory than the winner in a game of pure luck?

STEIND. The loser? (*Beat.*) I only mean: defeat will leave you without honor *and* with your debt intact. Does that prospect not frighten you more?

(*Pause.* **LENCK** *simply looks at* **STEINDORFF**.)

STEIND. So be it. I will summon soldiers in the morning to arrest you. And so I hope you have selected an audition piece with all its melodies clustered in the center of the keyboard.

LENCK. Why is that?

STEIND. You will be able to reach little else. With your wrists shackled together.

(*Another bustle of entrance. The two men look up as a tide of cohorts once again disrupts the room.* **SCHOTT**, **FASCH**, *and* **KAUFMANN** *enter together.*)

KAUF. Gentlemen! Why do you keep us waiting?

SCHOTT. (*Outraged, to* **FASCH**.) An alehouse fiddler! Speaking that way to me!

FASCH. (*To* **LENCK** *and* **STEINDORFF**.) Please, won't you join us at last?

KAUF. We have encountered some lovely young women! But we require a third for dancing.

STEIND. (*Pointing to* **SCHOTT**.) You have a third.

FASCH. Herr Schott will not dance.

SCHOTT. I will not dance to *that!* A Rondo, a Bourée, a Passepied! What do the French know about dancing that the Germans do not?

FASCH. Still, there was no need to become aggressive.

SCHOTT. (*To* **LENCK** *and* **STEINDORFF**, *an appeal.*) I asked the tymbalist if he would play an Allemande! Or grace us with something by the masters of the last century: Tundert, Kerll, Hammerschmidt, Scheidt, Schein, Schutz!

STEIND. Gesundheit.

SCHOTT. That was the man's reply exactly! And so I grabbed his neighbor's lute and smashed it on his chin.

(*Another exodus has begun. This time,* **KAUFMANN**, **SCHOTT**, *and* **STEINDORFF** *go off together, with* **FASCH** *trailing a few steps behind.*)

KAUF. To the dance!

STEIND. Will Gisela not object to the spinning of tavern damsels?

KAUF. Oh, do you know her?

(**KAUFMANN**, **STEINDORFF**, *and* **SCHOTT** *are gone, this last fading.* **FASCH** *turns back to* **LENCK**, *who has remained still and silent throughout the hubbub.*)

FASCH. Join us. We shall drink to an honorable competition in the morning.

LENCK. Herr Fasch? May I have a…?

FASCH. What?

LENCK. I do not know. For what I need there are, perhaps, no words.

(**LENCK** *begins to weep.*)

FASCH. My dear Georg! What is the matter? What has so distressed you?

LENCK. It is my Catherina. She has…taken ill.

FASCH. Oh, I am sorry to hear it. (*Pause.*) Although I cannot say I am surprised.

LENCK. (*Perplexed.*) Oh? Why is that?

FASCH. Well, I was never one to heed rumor, particularly, but I have heard from more than one resident of Laucha that a mysterious nursemaid called Bodenschatz attends her at the oddest hours of the –

LENCK. Yes, well, one never knows when the worst of it may strike.

FASCH. One never does. But what do you want of *me*?

LENCK. Her treatment is most…expensive.

FASCH. Ah.

LENCK. Appallingly so. Why, to ensure her survival would cost some four-hundred thirty florins!

FASCH. I say!

LENCK. *And* eighteen groschen. And nine pfennig.

FASCH. What sort of doctor would demand a king's ransom for survival itself?

LENCK. It is not the fault of the doctor. He is expert in the use of all forms of Emetics, Sudorifics, Febrifuges, and Mercurials. But *this* illness is as rare as the lady herself. And there is only one cure. Which, by the way, will also require several horses and oxen.

FASCH. Oxen? What sickness *is* this?

LENCK. It is called… False Pox.

FASCH. (*Beat. He is not fooled.*) It sounds …harrowing.

LENCK. It certainly is.

FASCH. (*Playing along.*) And…her family will not help?

LENCK. The Kirkendales despise me, and are convinced that her illness is feigned, to steal their money!

FASCH. (*Enjoying the game.*) Lenck, even if I had such an amount…and who does?…I am the wrong man to ask. Zerbst is in utter disarray.

LENCK. Since when?

FASCH. Why…since the flood!

LENCK. Zerbst is in the mountains.

FASCH. And thus we were most unprepared. Disease is rampant, and our doctors, having never learned to swim, all drowned. I have encountered every plague that nature has to offer on the roadside near my home. Indeed, I am surprised I have not encountered Catherina's False Pox in my own township's fetid streets.

LENCK. In a cruel twist of fate, it strikes only the extremely beautiful.

FASCH. Then those closest to me are themselves at risk. My Anna has just borne us our first daughter, you see. They must both have every coin of mine at their disposal.

LENCK. Think no more of it. You are a fine man.

FASCH. I have no choice but to live humbly.

LENCK. That is what I said.

FASCH. I will pray, my friend, that her humors properly balance themselves.

(*A moment.* **FASCH** *starts to laugh.*)

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