

**BARON  
WENCKHEIM'S  
HOMECOMING**

## WARNING

He took an apple out of the basket, rubbed it, raised it to the light to examine it, made sure it was shining everywhere, and raised it to his mouth as if he wanted to bite into it, he didn't bite into it though, instead he drew the apple away from his mouth and he began to turn it around in his palm, while his gaze ranged over the people standing around, assembled before him; then the hand that was holding the apple dropped into his lap, he sighed deeply, leaned back a bit, and after a long silence which, in the whole heaven-sent world, meant nothing at all, he said: speak to me, say whatever you want, although he would actually recommend that no one say anything at all, because the person could say this or that, and it wouldn't have any meaning anyway, because he wouldn't feel himself in any way, shape, or form to have been addressed—you, he said in a metallic voice, will simply never be able to address me at all, because you don't know how to, it's more than enough for me if you somehow handle your instruments, because that's what's needed now, for all of you to somehow handle your instruments, because you have to make them ring, make them speak—he raised his voice—in other words make them *depict*, he explained, and there was this: he already knew everything, and, he added, he wouldn't mention at this point that he was already, of course, in the most complete possession of knowledge about everything, and this pertained to the matter that they—he raised the apple in his hand, and while he held it firmly in his palm with four fingers, he extended his index finger, and

pointed at them—that they, music-making gentlemen, should inform him concerning all matters immediately, before me there can be no secrets, this is the main thing, I want to know about everything and in due time, regardless of the fact that—I reiterate—everything that could be possibly known is *already known* to me in the greatest possible detail, before me you must not be silent about anything, even the most insignificant detail must be reported to me, namely you are obliged, from this point on, to give to me unstinting accounts, namely, I am requesting your trust; and he began to explain what this meant, saying that something—in this particular case, the trust between them—needed to be unbounded as possible, without this trust they would never get anywhere, and now, at the beginning, he would like to chisel this forcefully into their brains; I want to know, he said, how and why you lift your instruments from their cases, and now, he explained, the word “instrument” should be understood, for simplicity’s sake, in a general sense, namely he wouldn’t start bothering with the details as to who was playing the violin, the piano, or who plays the bandoneon, the bass, or the guitar, as all of these were uniformly and appropriately designated by the term “instrument”—because the main thing, he said, is that I want to know what kind of strings the string players are using, how they tune them and why they tune them in that exact way, I want to know how many spare strings they keep in their case before the performance, I want to know—the metallic tone in his voice grew stronger—how much the pianists and the bandoneon players practice before the performance, how many minutes, hours, days, weeks, and years, I want to know what they ate today and what they’re going to eat tomorrow, I want to know if they prefer spring or winter, the sun or the shade, I want to know . . . everything, you understand, I want to see the exact image of the chair they practice on, and the music stand, I want to know exactly what angle it is set at, and I want to know what kind of resin is used, especially by the violinists, and where they buy it, and

why exactly from there, I want to know even their most idiotic thoughts concerning the falling resin dust, or how often they trim their nails, and why exactly then; in addition, he also wished to enjoin them—he leaned back in his chair—that when he said he wanted to know—and they really shouldn’t gape at him with such fear in their eyes—that also meant that he wanted to know the most insignificant details as well, and in the meantime they needed to realize for themselves, that he—whom essentially they could refer to as a kind of impresario, if somebody were to inquire—that he was going to observe their every step, their minutest of quivers, all the while knowing precisely in advance all about that possibly minutest of quivers, and they, all the while, would be obliged to make detailed reports about these matters: accordingly, they now found themselves between two fires—to sum up, on the one hand, there was, between them, this unconditional, unbounded trust, as well as the obligation to report everything; on the other hand, there was the undeniable, but for them endlessly disturbing, indeed unsolvable, paradox—don’t try to comprehend this, he suggested—of his knowing in advance everything they were obliged to report, and in much more detail than they did; so their contractual agreement would, from this point on, proceed between these two fires, about which—and this is something that he would add, he added—they should be aware that this also implied an exclusively unconditional dependency, naturally unidirectional and one-sided; what they were going to tell him, he continued—and once again he began to turn the apple that was radiant in the resplendent light slowly in his palm—what they told him could never be shared with anyone else, take note, and for all eternity, he said, that what you are bound to tell me must only be told to me, and to no one else; and parallel to this, never expect that, under any circumstances, that I—he pointed to himself with the apple in his hand—following this present and (for you) fateful discussion, will say anything again, will explain or explicate or repeat anything—more-

over, it would be even better if you listened to my words as if (and here I'm joking now), as if you were listening to the Almighty himself, who simply expects you to know what to do in any given situation, in other words, figure it out for yourselves, this is how things stand, there can be no mistakes, that metallic voice quivered more ominously than before, there would be no mistakes, because there *could be no mistakes*, everyone here, he opined, was capable of accepting this; of course he wouldn't claim that their cooperation henceforth—he was explaining what this entailed only once, namely right now, clearly, and in detail—would be a source of great joy for them, because it wouldn't bring them any joy, and it would be better if now, from this moment onward, they would regard it as suffering, as they would get along much better if now, at the very beginning, they would conceive it not as a joy, but as suffering, a kind of hard labor, because in reality what awaited them now was suffering, bitter, exhausting, and torturous work, when shortly (as the one single accomplishment of their cooperation, albeit an involuntary one), they would *insert* into Creation that for which they had been summoned; in brief, there was no room for mistakes here, just as there were to be no rehearsals, no preparation, no “well, let's take it from the top,” and suchlike, they weren't just playing some *milonga* here, they had to know straightaway what they had to do, and these words, he said, no matter how misleading *in their essence*, or, if they were understanding him only on a superficial level—which was the case here—would never smooth away the aforementioned sweat and lack of joy, because that was their fate, through their activities no pleasure would ever be extended to them, for taken as individuals, what were they?—a band of music-making gentlemen, he thundered at them, just a troop of scrapers, a ragtag crew flailing away helter-skelter at their instruments, who could never take credit for the whole; by which, in their case, he meant the production before them, namely, in no way could they trace back to their own individual selves what

they were to signify as a whole; so, he told them, they should realize this whole thing had nothing to do with them; if they took it upon themselves in full measure to honor their contract it would *somehow* emerge—who the hell knew how—but it *would* emerge somehow, and right now he could never repeat enough that he knew that this is how it would be, because this is how it had to be, it would be much better for them to resign themselves and not make any inquiries: as, for example, if in each particular case, the ineptitude was really so great, then how could the end result, created together, be so different—he wasn't willing to answer questions like this, he said with weary arrogance, no, as this was none of their business, they could rest assured that as a matter of fact, none of them were contributing anything, each with his own ineptitude, the mere thought should never enter their minds, but enough about that already, because just the mere thought of him having to think again and again—of the bow being scraped across that string *in that way*, or the keys being banged on *in that way*—filled him with dread; and all the while they would never understand anything of the whole, because the whole went so far beyond them, he was filled with horror, he stated with complete sincerity, considering the deplorable contingency of being badgered with questions, when he thought of how, just how much this aforementioned whole surpassed them as individuals . . . but enough about that, he shook his head, if, nonetheless, the fact—not even sad, but rather laughable—was clear to him of whom he had to work with here, in the end it *would* emerge, indeed, already at the beginning he would speak as, according to expectations, he was compelled to—and as for rebellion—his voice suddenly became very subdued—if anyone even contemplates a plan against me, or if the desire would be manifest, even in a suggestion, that anything should be executed any differently than how I want it to be—well, do not even let this appear in your dreams, cast it out from your minds, or at least try to cast it out, because if you make any attempts, the ending

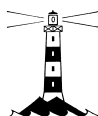
will be woeful, and this is a warning, although not a benevolent one, because there's only one method of performance here which can be executed in only one way, and the harmonization of those two elements will be decided by me—he once again pointed to himself with the apple in his palm—and only by myself; you, gentlemen, you will play according to my tune, and believe me, I speak from experience, there is no point trying to oppose me, no sense at all; you can fantasize (only if I know about it), you can dream (if you confess it to me) that one day things will be otherwise, that they will be different, but it won't be otherwise, and it won't be different, it will be and it will be like this for as long as I am the—ah, if we're coming to this already—*impresario* of this production, as long as I'm directing what's going on here, and this “as long as” is something like eternity, because altogether I am contracting all of you for one single production, which is at the same time, for all of you in this role, the one single, possible performance; any such other performances are automatically excluded; there is no after, just as accordingly there is no before, and apart from your admittedly modest compensation there is no reward whatsoever, of course, accordingly, no joy, no consolation, when we're finished with it, we'll be finished, and that's all—but I must disclose to you now, he disclosed, and it was as if that metallic voice had softened just a bit for the very last time, that it will be none of those things for myself either, there will be no joy, no consolation, and it's not that I could care less whether there will be joy or consolation, or about what you'll all be thinking and feeling following this agreement that we have established, and not in the least about how you will explain the piteous quality of your participation here later on, namely what kind of lies you'll be telling yourselves, I'm not talking about that, but about the fact that there is no joy for me in this whole thing, and my own fee is hardly tenable in view of what we are calling a production here—it shall come to pass, he said, because *it will be*, and that is all, I don't love and I don't

hate you, as far as I'm concerned you can all go to hell, if one falls down, then another will take his place, I see in advance what will be, I hear in advance what will be, and it shall be sans joy and sans solace, so that nothing like this will ever come about ever again, so when I step onto the stage with you, musical gentleman, I won't be happy in the least, if this commission, predicated upon a possibility, comes to fruition—and I now wish to say this to you as a way of bidding farewell: I don't like music, namely I don't like at all what we are about to bring together here now, I confess, because I'm the one who is supervising everything here, I am the one—not creating anything—but who is simply present before every sound, because I am the one who, by the truth of God, is simply waiting for all of this to be over.



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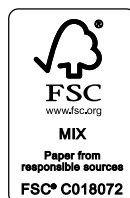
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## DANCE CARD

*TRRR . . .*

I'll Cut You Down, Big Shot

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Pale, Much Too Pale

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He Wrote to Me

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*TO BE CONTINUED*

TRUM, DUM, RUM, ROM, HMMM, RA DI DA, RUIN, DOM

TRUM, DUM, RUM, ROM, HMMM, RA DI DA, RUIN, DOM

TRUM—RA DI DA, DI DA DOM

*TRRR*

Da capo al fine

*TRRR ...*

## I'LL CUT YOU DOWN, BIG SHOT

He didn't want to go over to the window, he just watched from a respectable distance, as if those few steps he'd taken from there would offer protection, but of course he looked anyway, or more precisely, he was incapable of taking his eyes off it, because he tried to strain out, from the so-called clamor filtering in, just what was going on out there, but unfortunately at that moment no clamor filtered in, so altogether he would be able to state that there was silence, and as far as that went, there'd been silence for quite a while now, and yet after everything that he'd been forced to endure ever since yesterday, he really had no need to go over there, remove the Hungarocell polystyrene insulation panel, and peer out through the gap thus liberated, because even so it wasn't so difficult to extrapolate events, namely that from behind the security proffered by the Hungarocell panel, concealing the events taking place outside, he still knew with dead certainty that his daughter hadn't cleared off, she was still standing around there in front of his hut, accordingly approximately twenty-five or thirty steps away, so in a word he said to himself "I'm not going over there again, and I'm not going to look out there," and that's where things stood for a time, really, he stood, at a safe distance from the window, and he tried to listen, withdrawing, as it were, behind the protection of the Hungarocell panel, and in this state of protection—he repeated to himself, not only inside his brain, but aloud—there was no point in removing the Hungarocell panel yet again when he'd only be greeted

with the same sight as before, no point, he shook his head, but like someone who knew that he was on the verge of removing it again anyway, well, what could he do, he was flustered, already yesterday evening at 5:03, accordingly after twilight, he'd believed it was all over already, and that didn't happen, because night came, morning came, and ever since then, every single time he pried the Hungarocell panel away, already even while he was moving his hands, he had absolutely no doubt that as soon as he shifted that panel and gazed out through the crack, he would see exactly what he'd seen before, just as his daughter out there would notice that in his so-called "window" the Hungarocell panel had been moved, namely that she would get a glimpse of her father, purse her mouth contemptuously, and *immediately* raise that rotten sign toward his head, a smile appearing on her face that would send chills down his back, because this smile told him that he was going to lose—so he concentrated as much as he could for a bit, from his secure bunker, on everything that was happening outside, but then he couldn't take it anymore, and because no sounds were filtering in now, he once again removed the Hungarocell panel from its opening, and then he put the panel back again, because of course he had sized up the situation in a single second, and because of this—and not for the first time ever since this whole circus started up—his hand began to shake so much from nervousness that, as he tried to stuff the Hungarocell panel back into the crack, small bits and pieces began crumbling off of it, but he couldn't stop his hand from shaking, he just looked at his own hand as it trembled and that caused him to be filled with suddenrage, which made him even more nervous, because he was certain that he wouldn't be able to make any good decisions with this suddenrage, and he had to be able to make good decisions, he began to repeat to himself again in a subdued voice: "calm down, calm down now already," and this even worked to a certain degree but the nervousness was still there

(and this equipped him with a kind of fortitude): the nervousness remained, but not the suddenrage, so that in this state he now returned to the question of *why* what was happening outside was happening, because as to *what* was happening, he was able to grasp that naturally, once again it was nothing new, he however was less and less able to control himself, and he felt the suddenrage was about to overwhelm him again, and he would have been very happy to scream at them to get lost before it was too late, so that the local TV team, accompanied by the local journalists—whom his daughter had succeeded in luring here—would quit this whole thing, and get lost while they could, but he didn't scream out to them, and of course they didn't quit, they didn't get lost, and especially not her, not this girl who did not for a single moment leave off her "position," as opposed to the journalists who nonetheless stole away now and then to take a leak or warm up and finally—or so he believed—to get some sleep at night so they could return the next day at dawn, albeit reduced in number, not this girl, though, she just stayed there, or at least it seemed to him that her entire being—as she planted herself onto one spot where she had an excellent view if anything even as much as stirred in the window of the hut—suggested she would not leave this place until she got what he, this "skunk," had owed her from the moment she'd been born, as she'd stated in the first interview she'd given there, which of course, from the Professor's point of view was pure absurdity, because what could he owe anyone, especially this spoiled, misbegotten child, there in front of his whose conception, coming into and then remaining in this world, in addition to being a cheap evil trick, he could only attribute to his own irresponsibility, carelessness, unforgivable naivete, endless egoism, and boundless vanity, namely his own innate boorishness, the consequence of which he had never seen either in a photograph or with his own eyes—in addition he hardly could recall (indeed expressing



the essence of the thing a little more sincerely, he expressed to himself more sincerely), he could hardly even remember that he had a daughter at all, who, as people tended to put it, was “from the wrong side of the blanket,” he’d forgotten about her, or, to put it more precisely, he’d learned not to think about her, at least when he was able to do so, there were periods — even if transitory — when he was left in peace, sometimes even for years, just as now, he’d been left unperturbed “from that direction,” he’d washed his hands of the entire matter, as in general he did with his entire past, he’d washed it away, and as for a good few years now nobody had been pestering him, he’d already reached the conclusion that he was free of all this, free, that is, until yesterday afternoon when out of the blue, unexpectedly, this daughter had just suddenly shown up here, and grabbing a megaphone, yelled out to him “I’m your daughter, you basest of skunks,” and then “now you’ll pay,” then she raised a sign, and there could be no doubt that this “little monster” attacking him so unexpectedly out of the blue had planned everything quite well in advance, because she had acquired (or had she always had one?!) a kind of bullhorn-type thing, she had cobbled together a sign, she had gotten the local press to come with her, and she had arrived here with them, so that it seemed that she really knew what she was doing, and this, at the beginning, was already frightening to him, because it obliged him to assume that he had forgotten something else as well, something else he should have known that he didn’t know, because he hadn’t thought of it, because without that supposition, none of this made any sense, because what the hell did she want here after so many years, that is to say after nineteen entire years, he tried to remember but he couldn’t, as he’d already advanced greatly in his hitherto completed exercises and he wasn’t capable of remembering, particularly something so far back in the past, and this now appeared to be dangerous, because if he couldn’t remember what he was supposed to remember, then he wouldn’t be able to protect himself, he tried con-

vulsively to piece together what it was, everything here was so senseless, because nothing was happening as could be expected, for example “this daughter” did not proceed simply by knocking on his door and directly telling him what her problem was, but she “immediately took aim,” she had arrived, having prepared everything in advance, namely she had started off here with the biggest hoopla possible, namely she was staging a protest, in order to make sure that scribbling riffraff came along, because of course, what was a demonstration without this scribbling riffraff, nothing, looking at it from the girl’s point of view, the entire event was accordingly calculated, deliberate, and planned—her entire program, its progress, its choreography—whereas from his point of view, it was troubling from the very beginning, from yesterday at 12:27, and it was still troubling to him now, here in the midst of events, because on the one side there was his bewilderment and incomprehension, and of course his suddenrage, on the other side, however, there was someone he didn’t even know, someone with a clearly planned strategy, and only now had the existence of this strategy been disclosed to him, i.e., the fact that she had one, and that she had arrived with it, namely with her strategy in tow, because it was as if the whole thing were being realized only through these smaller steps building upon each other in a hierarchical manner, and this was, directly, that certain beginning she’d planned in advance, yesterday at 12:27: to surround him with the journalists and two television crews as soon as they located him in the Thorn Bush, as the locals called the terrain—completely feral, impenetrable, and abandoned to its own fate—that lay to the north of the city; it was clear that she wanted immediate witnesses, witnesses who would write and record what she was about to yell into her bullhorn or whatever it was, namely “come out you skunk”; the “skunk,” however, didn’t even understand what was wanted from him, at the beginning he understood nothing at all, he didn’t even know who she was, who these people were, what they were yelling, or what

they wanted with him, only later did it began to dawn on him who she was and who these people were, and that this daughter wanted something very much, which made him think and consider for the first time: well, so what can she want, the same as always, if not in the form of a personal request but a legal demand, namely—money, because in addition, she spoke about this in her interview the next day, but very indirectly, she made allusions; the only problem was that the whole thing seemed too serious, too far-reaching, and the resolve with which she attacked him was too troubling—because that’s what was going on here, he was being attacked, there was no other way to put it, as the Professor put it to himself, he’d been taken by surprise and he was being struck down, he was the victim; he now began to suspect that maybe on this occasion, in an alarming fashion, it wasn’t even money that was behind all of this; he, in his hut, didn’t get the sense, from this entire circus, that it was yet again about the “the extortion of accumulated maintenance payments amounting to tens of thousands,” as had been demanded of him during her entire nineteen years until this point, and which he wouldn’t be able to fulfill now either, and she, his daughter, had to know this, if she were to inquire just even a bit as to his situation, as clearly she had inquired, because otherwise how could she have known where to find him, in a word: nooo, in the past few hours he had shaken his head many times when he tried to tackle this question, no, something else was going on here, the girl seemed ready for anything, and it was obvious that at the very least she had been cut from the same wood as her mother: the evocation, even for a mere moment, of whose figure and features, detested a thousand times over, caused him, the Professor, decisive physical pain, so that for years now he had not evoked it, only now when he was forced to do so, and to determine that although he saw his daughter for only a brief moment, only now and then for a brief Hungarocell moment, he could see that “she really resembled her”—indeed she resembled her so much he

stared with his eyes wide open in horror—that as a matter of fact she was exactly like her, and with this “exactly like her” he quickly came to the fundamental aspect of this question: yes, this girl in the most decisive way possible was exactly like her mother, but even worse, so much worse, in any event she didn’t even clear off at evening, namely yesterday at exactly the fall of dusk, it was 5:03, and she didn’t leave the spot along with the journalists, so that when they were suddenly swept away to pursue some newer sensation (about which he could hardly guess, as he had thought that they had cleared off to get some sleep), yes, it was entirely likely that she’d stayed there all night, this is the conclusion he reached, but he hadn’t gone any further than this, because after dark it had been futile to try to shift the Hungarocell panel upward, it had been futile to try to see in the darkness if she was still there, the darkness had been so dense that he didn’t see anything, he didn’t dare go outside, so as not to become an object of attack, not to mention the fact that he had built up his hut in such a way that the door could only be opened from the inside after some serious labor, and from the outside—due to considerations of defense—it was impossible to tell where the door was, in a word it really seemed that two people had slept poorly the preceding night: he here inside, and the girl there outside, he was able to fall asleep only for a few minutes at a time, always startling awake in fright, and clearly the same thing could have happened with the daughter too, but he couldn’t figure out how she did it, he couldn’t make it out, in any event from the first light of dawn he was on his guard, when he, from the inside, took down the Hungarocell panel and he looked out, he saw the girl standing in exactly the same place where she’d been standing the night before, he didn’t know how she did it, how she was able to withstand the cold and in general how she could have found something to lie down on in this spot which was clearly unbearably unpleasant to her, the entire thing was a mystery, this little whimpering cosseted child and the Thorn Bush, he couldn’t

wrap his head around it, so he was at the point of recognizing that he himself could have hardly made a better job of it, which made this daughter even more frightening in his eyes, clearly she had planned this scenario in advance in order to be able to “keep him under continuous fire,” and clearly she’d brought some provisions with her to withstand the cold, otherwise how could what had happened have happened: namely, that she stood there the next morning just as fresh and battle-ready, her gaze fixed upon him, as when she had arrived, standing there as if she hadn’t budged a millimeter, exactly in the same pose, and she wasn’t moving, and because of that nobody else was moving either, and it was already the second day, it was already 3:01 in the afternoon, he muttered to himself pacing back and forth in his hut, and no and no, this can’t go on like this anymore, the blood rushed to his head, he didn’t need to look at his watch—although he looked at it—in order to know that he was *already* late, that *already* more than one minute had passed since it had been time for him to commence his mandatory thought-immunization exercises, no wonder this was making him nervous, how could it not make him so, well if he thought about it—and of course he thought about it continuously—this was already the second day that had been ruined like this, and what was going on out there wasn’t simply an attack, but the threat of an attack, and nothing made him more nervous than a threat, a punitive measure announced in advance, an intimidation inserted into the murky immediate future, he pressed his ear to the Hungarocell panel, but outside nobody was saying anything to anyone, the girl was obviously standing there in the circle of journalists in her heroic pose, leaning forward a bit, like Nike of Samothrace, but she wasn’t speaking, so that it seemed that between her and the journalists there wasn’t any communication, although there hadn’t been too much of that anyway so far, only the first brief interview last night, and this morning—as opposed to the sensation of last night, as they were just kind of monitoring the situation to see