

# All of You Every Single One

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# Prologue

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THE LAKE IS FREEZING. The words – gelid, boreal, glacial – don't do it justice. Chunks of the whole break away, float and sink. Black oiliness, the consistency of nightmares; impossible to see where you should put your feet.

Snow is falling, silent and determined. The beach is quickly smothered – the pebbles, the upturned boat and the reeds become mere grey shapes. The lawn, sloping upwards to the house, glitters.

The occupants are in the deep sleep of the very cold. They knew the storm was coming, but the body does not always understand what it's told the first time. The blood retreats in such circumstances to the inner organs; fingers curl into soft palms; the hair forms a nest around the neck and shoulders.

The nursery is different. In this room, the fire burns all night – it's hard enough to get a three-week-old to sleep without the added complication of the cold. The baby is awake, waving her fists in vague figures of eight, staring up at the woman bending over the crib, who makes a shushing sound, and though the child is too small to understand, or to make out more than the blurred outline of a face, she closes her eyes.

An ember from the fire lands on the rug. The woman stares at it as it flares and dies. She picks up the haversack, in which are packed cloth nappies, blankets, some stale bread that won't be missed and

fifty Kronen stolen from Herr K.'s wallet. The baby is gathered up in a bundle of warmth and cloth. She turns to the door, opens and listens: the rasp of the butler's snoring. She spares a thought for him – he has always been kind to her – then walks down the corridor and hesitates at the top of the stairs. The child smacks her lips in the darkness as she creeps on.

In the downstairs hallway, she puts the baby, very gently, on to the carpet runner and goes to accomplish the business of covering her tracks. On her return, she unhooks her coat from the coat-rack next to the front door. It is even colder on this level, heat rising, as it will; she can feel her fingers stiffening already. She lifts the coat and shrugs it on.

An oil lamp has been wavering, unnoticed, along the corridor from the back of the house: gold corona, craggy shadows. A man's face, bruised with sleep. His fingers, where they hold the lamp base, are a throbbing, sea-anemone pink.

'I heard a noise,' he says.

He must already know something is wrong, but he has always been slow to cross into the waking world. He raises one fist to grind it into his eye – trying to appear charming and childlike, even now – and with the other he puts the lamp on the hall table. The halo moves, showing him what's on the floor: the blind-mouse eyes and pale round face, bundled in bonnet and blankets. The bag.

'Where are you taking her?' he asks. The beginnings of a sneer. 'Out for a walk?'

She snatches up the first lamp and brings it round in a wide arc; it connects with his temple. The clunk of bone sinking tectonically into itself: if she's lucky, a compound depressed fracture of the left parietal bone. He folds to the floor like a cheap prima donna, and she picks up his daughter and moves to the door. Oil has spilled on the carpet and the lamp is extinguished. There is no blood that she can see. The door creaks as it opens but it is too late to worry about that. She steps out into the suffocating quiet of the snowstorm.

In fairy tales, such things happen at midnight. In fact, it is half past two in the morning, in a home belonging to the prominent Bauer family – the engineering Bauers – in the small community of Podersdorf on the shores of the Neusiedlersee, Austria's largest lake. It is 1913, and somebody in this house is stealing a baby.

1910

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## Eve

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VIENNA – INTO WHICH EVE PERRET steps, crying frightened tears – is the greatest city in the Western Hemisphere. This is known for sure by its one and a half million inhabitants. Art and music flourish; actors are gods, discussed in hushed tones in every coffee-house. Is it true that Fanny Erdrich will reprise the Queen of the Night? The boy-poet Stefan Zweig, who'll survive the Great War only to end his own life in a suicide pact with his wife, struts along the Ringstrasse with his latest collection warming his breast pocket. Meanwhile, Maestro Leon is said to be consulting Herr Doktor Freud for an illness in which he believes his human feet to have been replaced by the feet of birds.

Even at this late hour, a mile to the west, Adolf Loos is at work on the new Modern House on the Michaelerplatz. The foreman calls him over: shards of glass and fragments of twine have surfaced among the new foundations. Loos unpeels his scarf from around his face and remembers the rumour about the Habsburgs' greenhouses being buried nearby. With fingers clumsy from the cold, he makes an annotation on the civic plans – a flourish of the pencil – here in the greatest city, new discoveries are made hourly and recorded for future generations. And there's this, too: the foreman holds up a Roman coin. The dirt has been rubbed off, and by the gaslight it shines gold: *Vindobona* is written round the ring. You see? Layers

upon layers of lives, because Vienna is not just the best, but the oldest: people have flocked here since glaciers smoothed the peaks of the High Tyrol.

The giant amusement park, the Prater, is lit up. Because Vienna is cosmopolitan, a replica Somali village is being erected for the general edification, complete with real Somalis. There is a problem with the structure of the pen; opening will be delayed till next Tuesday. The Somalis, watching, wearing three pairs of gloves each, are unmoved. They are lodging with a Frau Pichler, who serves them only vegetable consommé because someone told her they cannot digest meat.

Omens abound. Mahler's *Symphony in E Minor* reprises, triumphantly, but its hurrying chromatics are held to signal disaster. Migraine attacks afflict all women within a five-mile radius. The conductor falls from a stepladder. When he dies, he has a bell installed in his coffin, as is the fashion: a precaution against being buried alive. Students make a vigil at the great man's graveside in the Zentralfriedhof, just in case.

But Eve Perret knows none of this. She's shakily lighting a cigarette, and standing in the shadows of some municipal building. Needles of freezing rain fall on the delicate skin of her parting. She is furious, heartbroken. Worse: she knows she has only herself to blame.

They arrived at half past five that same evening. The train swept, triumphant, into the Hauptbahnhof, and as it drew to a halt, Julia Lindqvist looked at Eve and said: 'Shall we?'

Eve dared to look at Julia's face, really for the first time since the beginning of their journey. Julia, who has chosen Eve; who has left her husband behind. Julia, who escaped through the orchard-gate that morning, hurried to the train; who has been too bright to observe, except when, between Annecy and Geneva, with the blank white mountains on either side, she fell asleep. For those fifteen minutes, when her beauty was slackened out of its perfection, Eve had looked.

Now, Eve finds she can only squeak a 'Yes'. She gets up. Her hand hovers at the small of Julia's back. How is Julia so confident,

moving down the train corridor, stepping out on to the platform? Her eyes are so merry: all seems like a game to her. And perhaps, Eve will think later, this is where it went wrong, or began to: the idea that it could really be just a game.

Julia is snapping her fingers rapidly. 'A cab, we need a cab.' She holds herself, arms crossed against the cold, and scans for the station exit. Eve scans too, and is aware of her own puppyishness, her lack of *savoir-faire*. Julia has travelled. (But has she travelled? How far? In their short acquaintance, there has not been time to ask all the pertinent questions.) She knows about cabs, carriages, whether to tip hotel porters, how to move through a crowd. This is the furthest Eve has ever been from Annecy; the furthest she has ever been from home. Nevertheless, she spots the exit first, and points.

'Ah,' says Julia. She is briskly practical: a last sweep of the platform. 'At least we weren't followed.'

Eve, who sees Julia's husband in every male face in the station, nods. It seems miraculous. He is a man of reach and vanity, and even though they had a few hours' start, she does not trust he won't somehow have arrived ahead of them.

Eve helps Julia up into the taxi-cab, then aids the driver in lifting their suitcases on to the roof. This is new, too: his searching gaze, looking for the swell of her breasts, which isn't there, looking for the bulge at her crotch, which isn't there. She is a puzzle, in her suit and hat, and in her muteness. At home – but Annecy is no longer her home – everyone knows her. They brought casseroles when her mother was dying. She is not remarked upon. The cabman's gaze says *Not my business* and *I must know* at the same time.

The cab smells of male sweat, boot polish. It is the first time they have been alone in an enclosed space with a stretch of some uninterrupted minutes before them. Eve chooses to sit on the opposite banquette. The cab starts to move and rock; Julia laughs and holds out a hand and says, 'No, here,' and Eve jumps up and sits beside her. The contact of Julia's hip and shoulder is intoxicating. Eve wants to slide her hand under Julia's skirt and into the crease of Julia's thigh, but to do so would, perhaps, breach some unspoken rule; it is better to try to be calm.

The carriage moves. The pulse-point in Julia's throat is jumping.



She turns her head into the crook of Eve's neck; takes Eve's arm and slings it around her shoulders. Outside, the city looms and recedes, a dazzle of almost-snow and flickering shadow, and none of it matters, because Eve holds her – shy, protective – in this position, for the first time.

# Julia

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THEY MET THREE MONTHS PRIOR, in the house in Annecy that Per, Julia's husband, had rented for the summer. Per was indoors, working on the third act of his commission for the Dramaten. High hot weather: the house, all through the afternoon, had been full of a secret giggly energy that seemed to shut Julia out. As she went downstairs at the appointed hour, she heard Per, in his study, laughing at one of his own jokes.

She told the cook to bring tea out to the orchard when the tailor arrived – no sense wasting the sun – and swept past her through the kitchen, only just remembering the old suit Per has left out to be copied. Out through the long grass. The green hummed around her, drowsy with late pollen.

A pair of slender shoulders, seated, facing away from her, at the outdoors table; a brilliantined bob, newly shaved hair on the nape of the neck. Of course nobody told her the tailor was already here. Of course the tailor was early. Julia smiled a wide, practical, bitter smile, walked around the table and introduced herself.

The hand that took hers was small. Eve's timid eyes, barely flickering over Julia's face. The snap of the buckles on Eve's case, so that it was open on her knees; she was, surprisingly, not shy, but all business, hiding in the unspooling of measuring tapes and the finding

and testing of pencil-lead. Holding up Per's old suit and squinting at the seams.

Julia knew a woman like this, once, in Stockholm, who played cards with the men. But she had thought, somehow, they were all elderly. If one followed (and she did) the arguments of Mr Darwin, such creatures were anti-evolutionary, a race about to die in the face of the age of logic. They were not in their middle twenties and handsome as noon. She resolved to be professional, and not let the bright curiosity of her face give anything away.

'What are you doing?' she asked.

'Copying your husband's measurements. Will he want the same material?'

A bitter joke hovered: *Who knows what my husband wants?* 'Yes,' she said.

She listened to the scritch of the pencil in Eve's notebook; she watched the lick of a forefinger to turn the pages back and forth.

'And how long have you owned your outfitters?'

Eve looked up from under her eyebrows. A pause before speaking. 'I don't own it.' Another pause. 'It's my father's business.'

*Blood from a stone*, Julia thought, for the benefit of her invisible audience.

Another excruciating pause. 'I took it on when my father started to lose his sight,' Eve said. The notebook was closed and pushed into the briefcase. 'Shall we say a week till the first fitting?'

'A blind tailor,' Julia said. 'Is he? Completely?'

Eve frowned at the outline of the mountainside, above the house; frowned so hard that Julia thought: *She is going to cry*. She saw, fascinated, that this person contained a lifetime of hopes and fears, just like anyone else. She rushed on: 'My husband will be so pleased with what you're going to make him. And the wives?'

'The wives?'

'They don't mind? Their husbands visiting a lady tailor?'

Bits of white dandelion clock drifted in the air. 'I'm not sure I count as a lady.'

Julia laughed, dazzled. The last of the instruments were packed away. Eve folded the suit with a quick loop of the hands and then there was no reason for her to linger.

She stood, and Julia did, too, and Eve's hand was once again in Julia's.

Julia brushed her thumb over the palm; held on a fraction too long. *Is this a person I can do as I please with?* But it wasn't that; not at all. Her own face, she could feel, was a lonely mask.

'Till next week,' Eve said, disengaging. She turned away through the long grass. At the gate, she lifted and dropped the latch with precision, making a joke of it. A half-wave; the edge of a smile.

Julia paced the rooms all afternoon and into the evening. She thought about Eve, and how she pretended to be unassuming, and not to have power, and was in fact flooded with it.

They kissed for the first time three weeks later, electrically, in a corridor of the house, with the maids changing sheets in a room nearby; Julia's memory is entwined with the lift and settle of white fabric, the sound of footsteps approaching, and the way Eve kept her eyes closed. Since then, they have been private on only two occasions. Once, alone for five minutes in the orchard, crouched in the shadow of the apple tree, but overlooked by the house. Once in the back room of Eve's shop, for seven minutes, while the errand boy was out. On both occasions, they have held back, from lack of time, but also for another reason. Eve wiped her mouth and said miserably, 'Let's wait,' and Julia had agreed. There was something to postpone, something she felt comfortable putting off. Because wait for what? Julia, consumed by curiosity, passion, understanding this thing about herself for the first time in her twenty-six years, has no idea how to touch another woman in that way.

## Eve

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THE CARRIAGE RATTLES TO A HALT. Eve's underclothes are silky between her legs; her suit is too tight around her body. Just an arm round her in the back of a cab, a thing that most couples might disdain: but the effect on her has been immense. Julia is still, too; then she sits upright, spiders a palm on Eve's chest. Her pupils are dark and drowsy; the pressure of her hand is soft on Eve's tender flesh. It seems that matters might progress here, in the cab; it seems for a moment this is the only way (spectators be damned), but the steps are being unfolded, and the cabman's face is in the window, florid, peering in.

*Unrivalled views of the Stephansdom*, the hotelier wrote to Eve; *greatest comfort*. She has spent half her savings on this one week's refuge. The hotel sign has a letter missing. Its windows are cloudy and dark, and geraniums stand on either side of the door, brown leaves lining the top of the soil. They stand on the pavement – Julia pays the cabman, who unloads their cases, draws away with one last curious look – and Julia pulls off her gloves, finger by finger, looking around with anthropological interest. 'Well,' she says. 'Well, well.'

Eve watches Julia, watching. A man brushes past, elbows flying, and makes her, Eve, jump. He looks nothing like Julia's husband, but there was something in his impatience, the unsteadiness of his gait.

She turns to Julia, mute, startled, and Julia says: 'I know.' She takes a breath in, and smiles. 'I know.'

She enters first, hips swaying through the double doors and into the reception, where a small boy is waiting behind the desk.

'Booking in the name of Perret and Lindqvist,' Julia says. 'We wired ahead.'

The boy takes the offered papers, reads them carefully, then asks, round-eyed: 'One room or two? For the *geehrte Dame, und ...*' The sentence falls away as he looks at Eve.

Julia says: 'Two.' Says it airily, as though it is obvious.

This has been discussed: the need for propriety. Still, it hurts. The boy pushes two sets of keys across the desk and withdraws his fingers before he touches Julia's hand.

'Will you require a breakfast tray?'

'Oh,' Julia says. She looks at Eve: suddenly daring, sly. 'I shouldn't think so. No,' and Eve forgets about the two rooms.

There are small, peephole windows on the way up the stairs; each frames a mauve sky, across which sleet is falling. The chill comes in, pooling around them as they climb. Eve focuses on the quick flurry of Julia's boots ahead of her. The corridor, when it comes, has a burgundy carpet runner – threadbare – and scuffed boards to either side.

Eve follows Julia to the end, where two doors are opposite each other. Julia flips the key-fobs in either hand.

'This is the one with the best view, I think,' she says, and steps towards the left. She slots the key and turns it. 'Coming?'

In all of Eve's night-thoughts, this has not occurred to her: that Julia would go first into the room, cross to the shutters and open them wide. That she would say, in a voice quivering with hope, 'Yes, this is very satisfactory'; then, with a smart practical movement, snap open the locks on her valise and begin to unpack.

What has Eve pictured? She has thought of lifting Julia over the threshold. She thought they'd tumble into the room, straight on to the bed; she hadn't thought the bed would have a frayed orange coverlet, silky-looking disc-shaped stains on the old chenille. The next image is of Julia's mouth, stretched open; the rhythmic thud of

the headboard. She has not imagined Julia looping clothes around her hands to fold them; shaking out Eve's tweed jacket and hanging it in the wardrobe in the corner.

'We'll go tomorrow and see the apartment that Grete recommended,' Julia says. 'But we might as well get settled, even if it's just for tonight.'

She turns, blinks, frowning at something. She is outlined in the white of the street-light through the window: Julia Lindqvist, with her slightly too pointed chin, her courtesan's laugh. Now is the time for Eve to be a man: to take Julia uncomplicatedly in her arms. To take what she wants. (But what does she want?) Perhaps, indeed, this assertiveness is what Julia is waiting for.

Julia turns, hands on hips. 'Are you hungry? We haven't eaten. We could go out to a restaurant. I could eat something. Could you?'

Eve sees – and it is glorious – that Julia is nervous, perhaps even as afraid as Eve. Julia rubs her hand on her neck, massaging the nape. 'Or there is the Café Schwarzenberg – I've always wanted to go – or we could just take a stroll, Grete says that's the thing to do here about this time of evening—'

Julia looks as though she may cry from fright: it's this that makes Eve cross the room, on an impulse to soothe. The *one-step-two-step-three* across the room, which seemed impossible ten seconds before, passes, and Julia is in her arms. Eve's hands slide round her back, and Julia's forehead is pushed into her shoulder.

Julia laughs. 'So ridiculous,' she says. 'He's not here, is he? He can't be here.'

Eve has stiffened at the mention of Per. She kisses the top of Julia's head, thoughtful, and the blood rushes through her. 'And ridiculous,' Julia says with a sigh, 'to be shy of you—'

This is familiar, from the corridor in the house at Annecy: the way Julia's teeth feel under her tongue, the heat of her mouth. Eve holds on to Julia's waist, careful not to move her hands, at first, until Julia places them herself, smoothing them on to her buttocks. The motion is practised, and this gives Eve pause, but is also exciting. Eve opens her eyes to see Julia pressed against her, feels Julia's heartbeat knocking at her own chest through the fabric of her blouse.

'Please,' Julia says.

Eve thinks, *She is thinking we may only have a short time.*

Eve grips Julia's forearms and walks her backwards across the room; lays her on the bed. Eve feels whole, with Julia spread out on the coverlet: that look of pleading submission. The impulse to take and take makes her gentle, and she puts a finger to the curve of Julia's chin.

'Come on,' Julia says. She sits up and pushes Eve's jacket off her shoulders. 'Come on.' She reaches for Eve's waist with a frown of concentration. Eve realises, joyfully, that she is looking for a belt.

In Eve's life, there is one thing she has consistently desired: to have a woman tug at her belt with want in her eyes. The fantasy came to her at age twelve. But she has never got further than this, in her imagination: the belt has never been tugged from its loops and dropped to the ground. What should happen next is unclear. The image is the thing: a sense of completeness. Not just the frustrating ticklish rub of fabric against her, the slick wetness and slipperiness and hardness between her legs.

Julia snakes the belt free and flings it aside. She fumbles with the buttons on Eve's trousers. Eve cradles Julia's head. Julia's hands work to shimmy the material down. Eve reaches for a strand of Julia's hair, twists it round one finger; on a drugged and blissful impulse – because what could be better than fixing this long-awaited image? – she looks over to the now-dark window.

She sees her own brutal ugliness. The white cotton workman's shirt rolled up to the elbows. Her cheeks, shamefully red. Her hips jutting forwards, begging for someone to touch, to kiss: what? Julia, beautiful, forced into this. The worst thing is the lock of Julia's hair, taken as if playfully; no, the worst thing is the look of sheer goblin-greed. And Julia's face: playing along. Just as she would have done with—

She pushes Julia away. Julia's eyes widen; but Eve sees relief, too – she's sure of it.

'What?' Julia says, wiping her mouth. 'What did I do?'

Eve has retreated two paces. She stands at the foot of the bed. Her trousers caught, ridiculous, around her knees.

'You don't have to,' she says. Even to herself, she is a spoiled child.

Julia blinks. Snakes of damp hair at her temples. But she is lovely.



The vision shifts, hovers, and Eve sees that perhaps she has got it wrong.

‘Come here,’ Julia sighs. She levers herself up from her elbows, crosses to where Eve is and puts her hands on Eve’s shoulders. ‘All right,’ she says. ‘It’s all right.’

Eve stands poised for flight. Julia’s hands continue to smooth her shoulders, working their way down. She breathes out. Julia begins to unbutton her shirt, working at the mother-of-pearl discs. It feels like being taken care of: a protective promise.

The buttons slip free and the halves of Eve’s shirt separate. ‘It’s only us here,’ Julia murmurs. ‘It will only ever be us.’ The blood is gathering again, pulsing concentric circles inside her. Julia pushes the shirt off Eve’s shoulders and the last confusing minute has been erased.

Julia’s face fixes. She looks down; stares at Eve’s chest.

‘I never thought of it,’ she says. ‘I don’t know what I thought.’

She puts a fascinated fingertip up to the bandages binding Eve’s chest, and – this is the worst thing – laughs, short and incredulous. Her hands move over the fraying fabric, over Eve’s breasts; she tugs experimentally on the loosening material and it is like being with a doctor, like those cold childhood examinations in draughty rooms.

Julia lets the hands drop. The bandages snake to the floor. Her eyes are tired. ‘Oh, no—’ she says. ‘Sweetheart, it’s safe—’ But Eve is gathering her shirt and shoes, her abandoned jacket, and running away.

Sheets of half-rain, half-snow; the sky above is black but the streets glitter with light, and everyone seems to have a purpose: a long drift of spectators towards the Opera House. Eve runs from one street corner to the next, head down, until she finds a doorway to shelter in. There she stands, trying to take a big breath, unable to get enough air.

When Eve was eighteen, she thought she’d met the person she’d leave her village for. The wife of a local worthy, already in her forties, stout but curious. There had been kisses. Eve had plotted a kind of marriage ceremony; imagined tears of joy in her father’s

eyes, her brothers standing, confused but stalwart, by her side. When Eve's hands had crept below the waist, the woman had pushed her away. *Whatever were you thinking?* The darkness fell for months. And then the boredom of the years; all the while the safety, the appalling sameness, until that day in the orchard. Julia's long pianist's fingers and way of clutching ironically at her heart when you said something funny or moving.

A man in a homburg looms into view, asking for something. It takes a few seconds to understand him; he mimes putting something to his lips. Eve fishes for her matches and cigarettes. The man says *danke* and moves away, just a glimpse of nose and mouth in the flick of the match, the inevitable upturn of the eyebrows when he sees she is a woman. Her unbound breasts hang against her ribs, their weight unfamiliar.

Two days after their encounter in the shop, two weeks after their first kiss. A note from Julia arrived. *Meet me at Roche de l'Aiglon. Please come now.* Eve, leaving her shop on some flimsy excuse; ascending the stone steps to the lookout point: Lac d'Annecy two hundred feet below. A party of Swiss hikers standing by the viewing platform, their boots crusted with dried mud. Julia, in her grey dress, in the attitude of one who has been waiting a long time; rising to meet her and saying in a low voice: 'I can't, any more, with him. I have tried. I am afraid it must be you.'

The sun winking from behind the clouds. Eve, careful: 'What do you mean?' Julia: 'I mean I can only ...' She licks her lips, looks away. 'With you. My cousin, Grete, wrote to me about Vienna. I'm fairly fluent. I mean, I have a reasonable competence. Is it far enough? Do you think he will follow us there?'

Eve tries to remember how it felt: that sharp swoop of joy that someone was choosing her, finally. The frantic hope on Julia's face. 'I can understand some German,' she'd said. 'I can learn,' and watched as Julia started to cry, covering her mouth with her hand, big sobs of relief. But now she hears something different in the remembered words: Julia running away from Per, not running towards her.

She could take the morning train home. She could explain to her father that it had been a mistake; resume the running of the tailor's shop. The gossip would die down. Her life – dull, but rarely desperate – could simply be picked up, and unspool comfortably

into middle age. She would never run away again, but she would never feel so lonely again, nor so ashamed.

She thinks of the thin strip of tongue that appeared between Julia's teeth at the sight of the hotel room; the *we-must-make-the-best-of-it* folding of the clothes. When has Julia, of the catlike smile, ever shown a great unexpected kindness?

The Stephansdom clock rings eleven o'clock; there is a shake of livery as the horses are put to bed. At the Modern House, Adolf Loos is packing up his things, blowing on his fingers and stamping his feet; the foreman extinguishes the lights, and places the gold Vindobona sestertius in his wallet. Maestro Leon sits on the edge of his bed, staring at his toes, which grow more webbed every day. In the Zentralfriedhof, the vigilant students are jerked awake by the tinkle of the bell beside the great man's tomb, and stare at each other; they have been waiting for just such a thing, wanting it, but now it comes to it, they hope it was just the wind.

It is past midnight when Eve comes back to the hotel. The small boy has long ago vanished from the reception desk and the lobby is empty.

The door of the room they chose is unlocked, unlit, and Julia is a huddled form in the bed. Eve knows intuitively that she is staring out at where the window-shape would be, where a crack in the shutters lets in a faint shimmer.

Eve undresses; folds her shirt; places her boots by the door. She has no hope, in the dark, of finding the key to the room opposite; there is no armchair in which she can curl up.

She pulls the coverlet back as gently as possible, slides in, and draws it over them again. She lies on her back. The reflection of early snow dances, shaken lace, on the ceiling. A long pale shape on the top of the dresser comes clear – her chest bindings, folded into tidiness, safely stored away.

Julia's hand steals across the mattress: the fingers locking tight with Eve's. They are quiet for a minute or more.

'Does it hurt?' she asks.

'More at first. It's been years.'

'How long?'

‘Since I was thirteen.’

The click of Julia’s palate as she swallows. The mattress shifts as she turns towards Eve. ‘You know you don’t have to do it for me. You can be yourself—’

Eve says: ‘It’s for me. It is me.’

‘But if it hurts you—’

Silence. Julia says: ‘I don’t know very much, do I? There’s a lot I don’t know.’ The sound is smothered by her hand, half over her mouth.

*Then say sorry, Eve thinks. Say sorry for hurting me.*

‘I am trying to understand.’

Eve tests her own depth of feeling. It is not enough, not nearly enough, to try to understand.

‘We should sleep now,’ she says, pulling her hand away, turning on to her other side. In the morning, she tells herself, she will go back to the station; she will take the first train.

She is surprised when she wakes up, and the room is grey with early light; surprised to have slept at all, and for a moment she does not know where she is. Panic, sadness, heat, shame. Sadness again, as she remembers the flight into the evening; the doorway where she sheltered like a criminal.

Julia is lying on her back, one arm flung above her head. She is naked, the covers having been pushed down the bed during the night. Her legs are parted, one knee bent, lying like the Tarot of the hanged man. A shock, to see her naked for the first time while she is asleep. Eve looks at the wiry hair, the shape of Julia’s stomach and breasts: all the forbidden things.

Julia moves her head towards Eve; her eyelids twitch, and her breathing deepens; the eyelids move again, and now she is awake. She focuses on Eve.

They watch each other. Julia is shuttered and wary.

‘Are you going to leave?’ she asks.

There is quiet in the hotel, in the corridor; no thundering footsteps, no angry pursuit.

Eve says: ‘I don’t know.’

Winter light inches into the room. Julia reaches for Eve’s hand

and places it over her sex, runs it down past the tuft of hair and into the cleft, where the skin is already slick and ready. She settles her thighs further apart; the tip of her chin points to the ceiling, as she says, 'Ah'; keeps holding Eve's hand, moving it up and down.

Eve watches Julia's face change, her frown deepen, clear, and deepen again; a snatched breath when Eve's hand slips; the sigh as the rhythm is resumed. Julia opens her eyes wide and stares at the ceiling. Her grip on Eve's fingers makes the skin whiten; everything is still for a moment, then she snarls; her body jumps as if an electric shock has gone through it.

She pushes Eve's fingers inside her; winces, then settles. Eve is not sure whether she is allowed to move, so she holds still. From outside the room, they can hear the city waking; trams hissing on the Ringstrasse and the clack of shutters opening. Julia's pulse is strong inside her; she sighs, as if confirming some long-suspected answer. 'Come here,' she says, pulling at Eve's hips. 'I don't care what you are. Come here.'