



PHOENIX KASPIAN

Ash

By

Phoenix Kaspian

This novel is a work of fiction. All of the characters, events and organizations described in this novel are either products of the author's imagination or used fictitiously.

Ash

©Copyright 2024 by Phoenix Kaspian.

All rights reserved.

For Klara, and all the brave children.

Prague

December, 1944

The street is empty and snow falls. Thick, soft and magical. Amelia runs quickly, following the tracks of the cart. The tracks turn down an alleyway, across a churchyard.

Amelia hears a shout through the snowfall.

“Halt!”

Amelia freezes.

“Stop there!”

The sharp click of a cocked rifle.

Heavy boots crunching through the snow.

“Oh. It’s just a little girl!” Says a voice.

“A little girl?”, asks another.

A shadow crosses Amelia.

Breath thick with whiskey warms her neck.

“Are you out stealing?”

Amelia is turned around.

Here are two Nazi soldiers. One of them has trouble standing up. The other has his rifle drawn and pointed at Amelia's foot.

“Why are you out here?” the first soldier asks Amelia. “Empty your pockets.”

“It's just a tiny little girl, let's go,” says the second soldier.

The other soldier stares at him furiously. “I will not allow this girl free reign of the streets. She's broken curfew.”

He then looks to Amelia again.

“What are you, child? You look like you have a little Jew in you?”

He pushes the tip of his rifle into Amelia's chest.

“What are you?”

Amelia stands to attention, and with fierce concentration she snaps her arm upwards and shouts .

“Heil Hitler.”

It echoes into the night, and down the street. The soldier takes a step back, smiles and begins to laugh.

“She's so serious,” he says to the other soldier.

He turns back to Amelia, lowers his rifle, stands to attention and raises his arm to match hers.

“Heil Hitler”.

They both stand for a moment, frozen in the night air. Amelia shivers through her sweat.

“Go home,” says the soldier, lowering his arm.

Both soldiers turn and walk away, she hears them laughing for a moment, then the snowstorm swallows them up and she is alone again.

“Heil Hitler,” Amelia says quietly, and looks down at her left hand. The fingers are tightly crossed.

The cart tracks are fainter now, filled in by fresh flakes. Amelia follows the tracks down a long street where they swerve and turn into a courtyard. She treads under an archway. Nearby there are voices and music. Amelia follows this sound and finds herself by a window, peering into a bar. Men are stood about drinking in candlelight. An old woman sits at a piano playing a piece Amelia recognizes.

“Škoda lásky, kterou jsem—”

Through the glass, Amelia spots her father. He is on a stage at the back of the room. Her father raises his hands. The room turns to look at him.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, may I have your attention? Tonight, I bring you an invention from my workshop. A creation that will shock and delight you. Darkness crosses Prague, but science continues its progress here in the greatest city in Europe.”

There is cheering from some men at the bar.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I give you: The Mechanical Man”

Amelia's father turns and whips the sheet off the shape on the cart. Underneath is a curious sight to behold.

On the stage, with her father, there is now a man sat on a box with a chessboard in front of him. But to look closer, you will discover that it is not in fact a real man, but a model of a man. A *mechanical* version of a man. There are cogs and pulleys and wires crossing his body. The Mechanical Man sits lifelessly, staring down at the chessboard.

Amelia's father waits a moment for the crowd to take this sight in. There is a hush across the bar and people adjust their chairs to get a closer look.

“This is the Mechanical Man,” Amelia's father says. “He plays fine chess.”

Amelia watches her father walk around the machine, adjusting levers and dials in fierce concentration. A young man at the bar shouts out.

“Give me a game then!”

“Sir. Please step forwards,” says Amelia's father, moving aside from the machine.

As the young man makes his way across the bar there is clapping and cheering. Amelia's father sits the young man in the chair facing the Mechanical Man. He walks around the device, flips a switch on the back of its head and announces, “Play!”

The young man sits and looks at the Mechanical Man, then out to the audience, smiling nervously.

“Move a pawn,” someone shouts.

“We are all pawns,” shouts another voice.

The young man turns to the chessboard and picks up a knight. He cautiously places it down in front of the neat row of pawns. He looks up at the Mechanical Man.

“Your move,” the young man says.

The Mechanical Man does nothing.

“Has he surrendered already?” shouts an old woman. “He must be from Prague.”

There are a few laughs. Amelia's father tinkers with the levers on the side of the man. The Mechanical Man's arm lurches forwards and over the chessboard. It hovers there for a moment, as if deciding which piece to pick, then, slowly, it nudges a pawn across the board.

Amelia can't see where the piece has ended up, but the young man looks confused.

“That pawn's across two squares,” the young man says. “It can't be across two squares. It has to be in one or the other. Which is it?”

“Has this metal man played chess before?” shouts the old woman. “He's not very good is he? I think this piano might be a more skilled chess player. Should we lift it up there for you, Franz?”

Amelia's father leans close to the Mechanical Man. His spanner twisting this and that.

“He's working now,” he shouts.

The Mechanical Man raises its other arm high above its head.

“He’s thinking,” announces Amelia’s father.

But the Mechanical Man’s hand falls backwards and drops off onto the floor. Then, the Mechanical Man’s head tilts backwards and smoke starts to rise out of his skull. The young man jumps up in fright and retreats from the stage.

Amelia’s father adjusts bolts on the side of the Mechanical Man, but there is no stopping this calamity. The Mechanical Man goes wild. It convulses in a fit, springs and cogs flying across the bar.

“Take cover, it’s going to blow!” yells the woman at the piano.

Then, with a final convulsion, the Mechanical Man comes to a rest.

“Out, out out! Franz!” shouts the bartender, picking himself up from the floor. Two burly men appear and drag the Mechanical Man off the stage and out through a side-door.

Amelia hides behind a wall and peeks over to watch the men dump the contraption in the courtyard.

Amelia hears her father arguing, then the creak of the wagon. She watches him drag the Mechanical Man’s cart out of the courtyard, past the window of the bar and into the street. She runs behind the cart tracks for a while, just out of sight. Then she darts down a side street to arrive home before her father.

•

Amelia watches from her bedroom window as Franz puts the Mechanical Man in the workshop. She hears the creak of the old wooden staircase as he climbs up to the kitchen. She hears the clinking of bottles and glasses.

Through the gap in her door she watches her father sat at the kitchen table, pouring a glass of rum, his head lowered, staring at the floor. Eventually he stands up, walks out of the house and back into the snowstorm.

Amelia watches her father walk down the street. She wonders where he's going. He has left his scarf in the hallway and Amelia wraps it around her head. She likes to pretend she's an Egyptian mummy sometimes. She read about them in a history book. Amelia stumbles about the kitchen, her head wrapped in the scarf, making groaning noises.

“Mmmmmghhhhhh!” Amelia says.

As if in reply, something below in the workshop makes a crashing noise. Amelia stops dead, not daring to breathe. Then there is another crash.

Nazis! — Amelia thinks.

She switches off the kitchen light and walks very carefully down the staircase. She knows exactly where to tread so that

the old boards don't creak. There is another crash from the workshop, and then silence.

Amelia gently pushes open the door to the workshop. It's cold and eerie in the moonlight. Grey shafts of light drop in through the windows. Amelia gets down on her hands and knees and crawls around the edge of the room. When she reaches the corner she hears another crash, it's the Mechanical Man. It's still convulsing. She stands up and walks over to the machine.

“You want to play chess?” Amelia asks it.

It makes no reply.

“I'm Amelia. Very pleased to meet you.” She offers the Mechanical Man her hand. It does nothing in response. “You're just a load of cogs and wires. No wonder you're not very friendly.”

Amelia leans close to the Mechanical Man, peering deep into his eyes. There are two amber colored jewels in the sockets. In the middle of the jewels Amelia can make out something moving.

“How very—”

The door to the workshop creaks open. Amelia ducks behind the Mechanical Man. A shadow stumbles into the workshop and reaches for the light-switch. A moment later the room is filled with dim light. Amelia shuffles further behind the Mechanical Man. Here, she notices a small door on the back of the machine. As softly as she can, she opens the door

and is relieved to find that (among the cogs and wires) there is enough room for her to sneak through the door and inside the machine.

She squeezes herself inside, closes the door behind, and listens.

Footsteps pace about for a moment. Stop. And then quicken. They get louder until Amelia is sure that she has been discovered. There is silence, then a ear-splitting bang as something heavy collides with the outside of the Mechanical Man.

The machine shakes with the impact. There is a splintering noise. Amelia frantically tries to open the door to the machine, but her fingers cannot find a latch.

Again, something smashes into the side of the Mechanical Man.

In her fright, Amelia pulls and twists on anything she can find inside the machine. Her hands grasp onto a rod, which she grips tightly. Something above her makes a groaning noise and then there is quiet.

Amelia can hear her heart beating. She looks up and sees a curious thing. Above her head is the underneath of the Mechanical Man's chessboard. And, because the board is made of frosted glass, she can see through the checkerboard pattern to the roof of the workshop.

Amelia can make out a shadow leaning over the board, studying the pieces.

As her eyes adjust, she can see how the machine works, or is at least how it is supposed to work. A series of levers, connected to cogs, allow the Mechanical Man to move its hands across the board.

Amelia watches as the shadow above her raises its hand above the glass. She braces herself for the glass to shatter but, instead, the shadow moves a rook from the back row of the chessboard to a new position.

The shadow above Amelia appears to want to play a game of chess with the Mechanical Man.

Confused, Amelia decides she will play.

Very carefully, Amelia manipulates the levers that control the Mechanical Man's arms. The motion is clumsy to begin with, but Amelia manages to push the white bishop diagonally two squares.

Now the shadow moves again, moving its king away from harm. Amelia counters by moving the Mechanical Man's arms and pushing a castle — which has almost fallen off the board — along its row, and blocking the shadow player's king.

“Checkmate,” Amelia whispers to herself.

There is silence outside the box. Then, after a moment, a voice.

“Amelia! Amelia! Come downstairs!”

It is her father.

“Amelia. Look at this!”

Amelia shouts from inside the Mechanical Man.

“Hello!”

The door she is hid behind pops open to reveal the face of her father, bewildered. He smells of vodka and tobacco.

“Amelia! My God. I was about to...”

Amelia looks down at her father’s hand. In it is a hammer. Parts of the Mechanical Man are strewn across the floor of the workshop.

“It was you! You were playing the chess game with me?” Amelia asks her father.

He smiles.

“Very elegant,” he says.

Franz paces about the machine, examining it. Every now and again he pauses at a particularly damaged part, touches it with his fingers and sighs.

Then he walks around the back of the machine and opens the small door that Amelia crept through. He shuts and opens it a few times and peeks deep inside the machine.

The door clicks: Open. Shut. Open.

“Extraordinary,” he says. “Just enough room for you, Amelia.”

Franz leans against the machine. Amelia looks at her father for a minute; his tired eyes and flecks of snow still half-frozen in his beard.

“Amelia,” he says with a grin, “Now we have a show to put on”.



The Saturday market in Prague is alive with chatter. Townsfolk are packed tight along the avenues. In the middle of the market is a small stage where Amelia peeks out through a small hole in the side of the Mechanical Man. She is hidden inside him. The hole is just big enough for her to see out, but nobody can see in.

Amelia sees, in the distance, Mr Novák and his two children bartering for a potato. Closer, she hears her father's voice shouting out to the passing shoppers.

“Join us for the most amazing spectacle! A Mechanical chess-playing Man! Yes, that's right, citizens, an automated chess-playing robot. Here, in Prague!”

Amelia spots the woman who was sat at the piano the other evening. The woman looks up at the stage and shakes her head.

“Still at it, Franz?” the woman says. “Safer out here than in my bar, at least.”

The rest of the market crowd ignore Amelia's father. There is nobody in the seats he has laid out in front of the stage. Amelia slumps back and rests.

An old man steps forward from the street. He walks up to the stage.

“Franz!” the old man says.

“I would like a game with your metal man here.”

Amelia hears the scrape of a chair across the wooden boards as the old man sits opposite the machine. She looks up through the glass of the chessboard. Her father has replaced the panel above her with a one-way mirror, Amelia can see out, but her opponent can only see themselves reflected in the chessboard painted on top.

Amelia sees the old man's face staring down at her. He adjusts a few of the chess pieces and then makes the first move, lifting a pawn and placing it two spaces closer to the Mechanical Man.

Amelia pulls levers to adjust the Mechanical Man's arm, picking up a knight and moving it in front of her neat row of pawns.

And so, the game is begun.

By the time the market clock strikes noon, they are deep into the match. Amelia peeks through the hole in the side of the machine and is surprised to see that a large crowd has gathered to watch the game. She feels nervous, but her position in the match is strong.

The old man is a cautious player, and Amelia has already tricked him into a position where he will easily be beaten.

Sure enough, the old man begins to play into Amelia's trap. She feverishly works the levers, crouched inside the tiny box beneath the chessboard. Her only light is a candle and it makes the space hot and stuffy even on this winter's day.

A hush comes over the gathered crowd.

Amelia looks up and sees that the old man has left himself wide open to checkmate. Amelia moves the levers and pushes her queen along the row of squares, neatly pinning him into an inescapable bind.

The old man stares at the board for a moment, then takes off his hat and very elegantly bows at the Mechanical Man.

Amelia hears a wild applause.

“Game to the Mechanical Man!” shouts her father.

Peeking out through the hole in the box, Amelia can see that a huge crowd has gathered around the stage now. She recognizes the grocer's children, hugging their mother's legs; Mr Dvorak from the bank and, at the back of the crowd, a group of Nazi soldiers.

For a moment the box goes dark inside. The candle has gone out. Amelia feels around in the blackness for a box of matches.

“A miracle of the modern world!” shouts her father outside the box. “Who's next to face The Mechanical Man?”

Amelia strikes a match. The bright spark blinds her for a moment. She lights a fresh candle.

It goes out.

“Fiddlesticks,” Amelia whispers.

There is the clump of heavy boots across the stage. Her father has recruited another opponent.

Amelia relights the candle and places it quickly on its stand. She hears the chair grind across the stage. Someone sits in it and

the chair scrapes towards her. Immediately, Amelia feels that something is wrong. She looks up through the one-way glass of the chess board and straight into the eyes of a Nazi commander. He lifts up a pawn and moves it two squares towards Amelia.

“Begin,” he says, looking right at her. Almost as if he can see her.

Shaking, Amelia’s small hands find the levers and she edges a pawn forwards. The commander laughs.

“Amazing,” he says. “Good technique.”

He moves another pawn forward.

Amelia, rigid with terror, takes a moment to collect herself. She picks up a knight, moving it over the line of pawns and advancing.

The commander moves again, barely pausing after the Mechanical Man has made his move.

Amelia recognizes the commander’s pattern of play as one her father has taught her. He has clearly played chess many times before, and Amelia struggles to keep up.

She spots an opening. The commander has become fixated on her King. She purposely moves the piece into an exposed position and the commander takes the bait, placing her in check. But Amelia has anticipated this. She gently slides the King back a square and coaxes the commander to react as she hoped he would. All she must do now is move a bishop from the far end of the board to place the commander in checkmate.

She reaches for the lever, but as she does so, the candle drops down onto the floor of the box and catches on the hem of her dress.

There is a sudden flash of flame and then a thick smoke fills the box. Amelia tries to hold down a cough and begins to writhe in the small space. She presses her mouth hard to the gap in the side of the box and takes deep breaths.

After a moment, she can breathe again, but the box has fallen into pitch black. She reaches down and feels across the floor of the box, her hand comes upon the matchbox, she lifts it up and goes to open it, but something is different about the matchbox. It feels light and powdery; it comes apart in her hand. The matches are burnt to a crisp.

The commander stares down at the board. His face looks fierce and impatient.

“Is it going to move?” he asks Amelia’s father.

“It’s thinking,” he says, while tapping on the side of the box. “It’s having difficulty playing against such a talented player as you Herr Schwartz.”

Amelia looks out through the gap and sees the faces of the crowd staring at the Mechanical Man on the stage. She looks back into the darkness of the box and feels for the levers. She can only find one, a lever that controls just one axis of the Mechanical Man’s action. She looks up to find that the chessboard window is black with soot. Amelia cannot see the board anymore. In desperate hope, she grips a lever tightly, and

pulls. Outside she hears applause and Schwartz's voice.

"That, I am afraid, is an illegal move," he says.

"Game to Herr Schwartz!" her father shouts. "Well done, Schwartz. An exquisite performance."

There is more applause and Amelia hears the soldier's heavy boots thump across the stage and off into the crowd. She watches Schwartz as he crosses the square and joins a group of soldiers. The soldiers huddle together and point at the Mechanical Man. Schwartz is speaking with some urgency and gesturing at the stage. His men nod and they march through the crowd towards the stage.

"Herr Fritz," says the commander. "Step down here."

Amelia hears her father step off the stage. She sees him standing by the commander. His long body towers over the soldiers. Two of them take a step back. The crowd is thinning now, and the market square is quickly empty.

"Did you make this machine, Fritz?" the commander asks.

"Yes, but clearly not well enough," her father says. "You are an excellent player, Herr Schwartz."

"It is quite remarkable," says Schwartz. "Quite remarkable, don't you think boys?"

Amelia recognizes two of the soldiers as the ones who stopped her in the snow.

"How does it work?" asks the commander, tapping the side of the box, inches from Amelia's face. "Looks complicated."

"It uses electro-magnetic fields," says her father.

The commander raises his arm.

“Enough, Herr Fritz. You’re frightening my men. They prefer simple things.”

The soldiers nod.

“Now, if you could explain how a woman works, then I’m sure they would be very interested,” the commander says.

The soldiers smirk at this. The commander orders them to leave. Amelia’s father and the commander stand alone in the square.

“Franz Fritz,” the commander says. “This invention of yours is very interesting to me. You keep it in your apartment on Dlouhá?”

“I keep it there, yes”

“Good, good. We must be very careful, Herr Fritz, very careful indeed. Take this machine home and keep it safely. I will send some men over to guard your door. This is a matter for the Reich. Do not let anyone touch this machine. I will call on you this evening.”

Berlin

Joseph Goebbels looks out of his window, across Wilhelmplatz. Outside, soldiers march down the street through the snow. The cold makes Goebbels' foot ache and he kneels down to nurse it.

Curse my foot, he thinks, removing his shoe and examining the bent flesh.

This morning was devoured by the thankless task of pacing the Nationalgalerie and examining works of art. His obligation to destroy the artworks that offend his morality— no, the morality of the *people*; for they are the same thing—has become quite exhausting. There are so many vices to rid Berlin of.

He feels a rage build in himself at this thought, but before it has a chance to blossom into violence there is a sharp knock at his office door.

Goebbels jams his foot into his shoe, straightens his suit jacket, checks his reflection in the floor-to-ceiling mirrors, turns around to face the door and shouts loudly, “Enter.”

Here in the doorway now is Schwartz. Goebbels feels a flash

of irritation. This is a commander that he has some memory of meeting at a party in Clärchens Ballhaus.

It was a party that ended pleasantly when the actress Lyla Vogel took such an interest in his novel. Later, he invited her back to the Ministry.

At this thought, Goebbels feels inexplicably anxious to write another essay on German superiority—already a sentence is forming in his head and he reaches for a pen, but then he remembers Schwartz standing in the doorway, staring in a quite unsettling manner.

“Herr Schwartz,” Goebbels says. “A delight. I am very busy today, I’ll invite you to lodge a message with my secretary.”

“Heil Hitler,” Schwartz says, raising his arm.

“Heil Hitler,” Goebbels says, lifting his hand a lackluster inch and turning away from Schwartz.

Outside in the snow, Goebbels notices a line of prisoners being ushered across the square. One looks exhausted and keeps falling out of line. The sight of this indiscipline disgusts him.

“Herr Goebbels?” Schwartz says.

“Will that be all?” asks Goebbels.

“I bring news from Prague. We have found a machine that may be of great importance to the Reich.”

“A machine?”

“It is a mechanical man that can play chess. Built by a man by the name of Herr Fritz, an inventor. I played a game of

chess against this machine. The machine uses electromagnets and a computational mechanism to predict chess moves, and it can play. It can play well. I am myself not an inexperienced player, as Herr Goebbels may remember from the championships here in Berlin just three years ago—”

Goebbels’ irritation drops away. A calm comes over himself at the recollection of a recent Chess Federation match when he paced between the players; admiring the prowess of Germany’s greatest chess minds.

“There is no display of our superiority more noble than a man in fierce concentration over a chess board,” says Goebbels. “Hitler shares my passion and has already given his support to chess matches in hospitals across Germany, raising the spirits of the injured so that they might quickly return to the theatre of war with bright spirits and a more tactical mind. But, we hardly need a contraption playing chess.”

“Herr Goebbels, this Mechanical Man can calculate movements on a chess board. We could make a show of the Reich’s engineering skills and bring this machine to Berlin and demonstrate it in public.”

Goebbels finds his mood lighten further at the thought of another public event.

“Schwartz,” says Goebbels. “If it benefits the Reich to explore the mechanisms behind it, then bring it to Berlin. I can’t guess at it from here. Good day.”

“Heil Hitler,” says Schwartz and leaves the room.

Goebbels finds himself in deep thought about Lyla. In this morning's paper she was described as "...a dazzling beauty, the finest and most lovely new addition to the Berlin film industry." Goebbels had, of course, dictated these very words to the journalist, as he had dictated all of today's news. But still, it pleased him to see his beliefs confirmed in print.

Overseeing those journalists at *Der Angriff* was a tiresome and thankless undertaking, but it was for the good of the people. Journalists hardly seemed to know what they were doing most of the time, he despaired. They required constant supervision—unable to follow a simple moral code. That of obeying him.

Just last week, one of them had been foolish enough to write a positive story about Picasso and it had very nearly gone to print. The German people would have been hugely damaged by such a immoral story—it is fortunate for them that Goebbels' eyes and ears are so keen.

The phone rings. It is Lyla, enquiring about their dinner that evening. She asks if Goebbels' wife will be joining them.

She will not.

•

Amelia opens the door to find Schwartz stood in the snow. He looks serious and grand in his uniform, Amelia thinks. The Nazis have Prague under siege and they terrify her, but up close they look like men in pantomime costumes.

Schwartz leans down to Amelia's eye level.

"Is your father home?" he asks.

Amelia nods and walks down the hallway to the workshop, exaggerating her steps so they echo loudly down the corridor, letting her father know they have a visitor. Two soldiers follow behind him.

"You walk like a soldier," says Schwartz.

"Thank you, sir," says Amelia and knocks on the door of the workshop.

Her father calls them in and offers Schwartz a seat by the small table. This is the table Amelia and her father use to practice chess. There is a game of chess part-way in progress from that morning. Schwartz studies it for a moment, looking intently at the pieces.

"May I?" he asks, pointing at the chess game.

"Please," says Franz

Schwartz moves the white castle forwards one square, then looks up.

"I have some news from Berlin," he says.

Amelia senses a boring conversation is about to take place, so she sits in the chair opposite Schwartz. She crosses her arms

on the table, slumps low, and stares at the chessboard, her eyes level with the pieces. She sees the battle from the miniature perspective of the chess pieces. Schwartz's castle seems to be part of a move calculated to draw her towards him. She begins to run through possible counter-attacks in her head. She imagines each possibility.

“Herr Fritz, I have some very good news for you. Some very good news indeed.”

Amelia picks up her rook and advances towards Schwartz's castle.

“There are interested parties in Berlin,” says Schwartz. “People who will be fascinated by the mechanism of your machine.” He looks across at Amelia and continues. “Prague is no place for a mind like yours. The conditions here are... The conditions trouble me, as I'm sure they do you, Herr Fritz. The people *resist* their liberation. Well, there is little more to be said on the matter, but I have orders. Amelia will be taken care of here, I assure you, and it may only be for a month.”

Amelia looks up from the board.

“Your offer is extremely kind, Schwartz,” says Franz. “But I cannot accept. The machine is far too sensitive to travel distance. It cannot play. I am missing parts and I would be remiss to allow you to stake your reputation on—”

“My reputation...” whispers Schwartz fiercely, “...is already staked.”

Amelia's father lowers his head.

“Let me be clearer,” says Schwartz. “I *insist* that you accompany me to Berlin to demonstrate your invention.”

Schwartz pulls his revolver from his waistband and rests it on his knee. The two soldiers leaning in the doorway stand up straight.

“I hope I have brought some clarity to the situation?” he asks.

Amelia’s father walks over to the Mechanical Man. He stands silently for a moment in the dim light of the workshop, running his hands across the mechanism.

“Of course,” he says. “We must go to Berlin. Me, *and my daughter.*”

“She remains here,” says Schwartz. “She will be well supervised.”

The soldiers look at each other. One of them smiles at Amelia.

She looks away.

Amelia’s father paces around the machine.

“Herr Schwartz, if you will indulge me, I would like to demonstrate something. Could you assist me in making a small adjustment to the action of the mechanism before we secure the machine for travel?”

Schwartz stands up and ruffles Amelia’s hair.

She sits motionless. “You’ll have a fine time here in Prague,” he tells her. “We won’t be gone long.”

Amelia feels something dying in her chest. The

overwhelming, absolute certainty that she will never see her father again. She stares hard at the chessboard.

Schwartz walks over to the Mechanical Man. Amelia's father pulls on the Mechanical Man's arm and cogs whirr inside the machine.

He hands Schwartz a tiny screwdriver and gestures to a cog deep in the belly of the Mechanical Man.

“That is the central gyroscope,” Amelia's father says. “It allows the Mechanical Man to orientate itself—to determine which way is right, left, up and down. It must be adjusted every day or the mechanism slips out of sync and a game cannot be played.”

Amelia's father checks the motion of the Mechanical Man's arm, stretching it this way and that.

“As you can see, Schwartz, the motion is off. Too far to the left. Would you adjust the cog clockwise around a half turn?”

Schwartz kneels down and peers inside the machine. He clasps the screwdriver tightly and attempts to navigate into the machine. The mechanism is packed densely, the most ornate and complex clockwork that he has ever seen. His hand cannot fit between the mechanism to reach the cog. He forces it deeper into the machine, but the springs and wires dig painfully into his hand.

“Franz, there is no way to reach the gyroscope. You must disassemble the front of the machine first.”

“But that will take weeks, Herr Schwartz. The mechanism is

complex and fragile.”

“Preposterous. The machine is adjusted each day, correct?”

“Yes, Herr Schwartz, every morning.”

“Then how?”

Amelia looks at her father in delight, jumps up from her chair and runs across to Schwartz. She holds out her hand to him. Schwartz stares at her for a moment, then he hands Amelia the screwdriver.

She reaches deep inside the mechanism, her small hand fits nimbly between the cogs and wires.

She adjusts the gyroscope.

Schwartz stands up.

“Very well, Herr Fritz. You have made your point,” he says. “You and your daughter will now pack for Berlin. We leave at six in the morning. Goodnight.”

•

Amelia hears the front door shut and the house is quiet. Her father sits by the machine, turning a cog over in his hands. She sits down next to him and rests her head against his coarse jacket. He smells of smoke and snow.

Amelia pushes her face deep into the fabric and closes her

eyes tight. She imagines a time before the snow, before the soldiers.

“How was the game going?”

“Oh,” says Amelia, smiling, “I was just about to tear him apart.”

Her father laughs. “Tear him apart, Amelia?”

“He was about to fall into a trap.”

She punctuates this by posing like a tiger. Her eyes wide and hands held up like claws. Suddenly her father looks very serious.

“Amelia, you know what will happen if they find out about what's really inside the machine?”

“Yes.”

“No need to think on that. Prague is no place for us anyway. Another game and then bed. Berlin is a long way from here.”

Her father walks over to the chess game Schwartz has abandoned, studying the board for a moment.

“I see. Yes, you could have trapped him here if he did this.” He makes two moves on the board. “And checkmate.” With that he scoops up the pieces and begins to set up the table for a fresh game.

Amelia looks out of the workshop window. It has just started snowing again.



Amelia wakes up, certain something is wrong. She sits up straight in bed, her hands against the cold, familiar linen, but there is a tension in the air, an electricity.

She slips out of bed and peers around her bedroom door. Holding her breath, she hears breathing in the corridor.

She listens very hard, and is sure she can hear very cautious footsteps, spaced a long time apart, as if whoever is making them wants them not to sound like footsteps at all.

Her father's bedroom door is closed and Amelia can hear him turn in his bed for a moment. The bedsprings moan in unison, then there is silence.

The footsteps have stopped. She sees a flash of torchlight and, downstairs, the hinges of the workshop door make a long, slow croak.

Amelia walks delicately down the staircase, stepping only on the spots where the wood is nailed solid and the old boards make no sound.

She looks down the steps to the workshop, the door is ajar, and in torchlight she can see the soldier from the snow; the Nazi whose rifle she felt in her chest the other night. He is standing over the Mechanical Man, reaching down towards the secret door in its side.

To Amelia's horror, the soldier opens the door and peers

inside. He pulls the levers that make the Mechanical Man's arms move, causing them to jerk wildly. It is as if the Mechanical Man is in pain. Then the soldier stops for a moment and stands up.

In his hands are Amelia's candle, and the small pillow she sits on in the machine. *He knows the secret of the machine.* The soldier picks up his torch to examine the rest of the workshop, it flits about quickly before dazzling Amelia. She stands frozen in the bright beam.

"Halt!", the soldier shouts and runs up the staircase towards Amelia.

Amelia screams and runs. Her father appears in the hallway.

"What is this?" he says to the soldier. "Does Herr Schwartz know you are here. He will be most displeased."

"I think he'll be very pleased," says the soldier. "Pleased that you did not make him the laughing stock of Berlin."

"Where is Herr Schwartz? This is unacceptable," Amelia's father says.

"Unacceptable?" asks the soldier. "I've taken a look around your machine. Seems like it holds more secrets than we thought. Seems like it holds something pretty important to you."

The soldier grabs Amelia by her neck. "How about we all go and take a walk. I think Herr Schwartz will be entertained by this. Very entertained. I've never shot a child before, but I think I might enjoy it."

Amelia's father turns to the hatstand, as if to fetch his coat. Instead, he grabs the stand like a staff in his hands and spins around quickly, ramming it into the soldier's chest. The soldier takes a step back towards the staircase, clutching his stomach in pain. Amelia's father lunges at the soldier again, this time the soldier falls hopelessly backwards, tumbling down the staircase.

There is silence in the house. Amelia peers down the staircase. The soldier's arms and legs are bent at the wrong angles and something dark is creeping slowly away from his head; a dark puddle of blood.

Fritz gently pushes Amelia aside and walks down the staircase to where the soldier lies. He puts his face close to the soldier, listening.

After a moment he grabs the soldier's legs and drags him through the door and across the floor of the workshop, leaving a dark trail. The workshop door slowly closes.

Amelia sits at the top of the staircase and waits. She can hear her father loading wood into the furnace. Through the wall, she can hear the faint sound of a radio next door.

Amelia has a radio too. She remembers her mother would often spend the evenings sat in the armchair by the window, listening to music on it. If it was a good evening, her mother might whisper,

“Come and dance, Amelia.”

Then Amelia would climb up onto the armchair and hold

onto her mother's hands— hands that were thin, cold and pale. Amelia held them like precious stones, afraid she might drop them. She would dance there, in the chair, ever so slowly.

After a few songs, her mother's head would dip and her mouth would let out a long deep sigh. Then she would whisper, "That's enough Amelia. I need to concentrate for a moment," or "Wasn't it a lovely dance, but you must be awfully tired now?" At this, Amelia would fold her mother's hands neatly across each other and climb down from the chair.

Amelia hears the furnace come to life. Her father opens the door to the workshop and looks up at her.

"Are we in trouble?" she asks.

"All of Prague is in trouble, Amelia. What is our trouble worth among all this?"

Amelia looks at her father. His face looks older than she remembers.

"How far is it to Berlin?" she asks.

There is a bang at the front door, the handle turns and Schwartz walks in.

"Good evening, Franz," he says, then turns to Amelia and dips his cap, "Amelia."

"Is everything in order for tomorrow? Where is Zimmerman? He was sent to keep watch." Schwartz looks around for a moment. Amelia stares down at her shoes.

"The drunkard," he continues, "Asleep in a doorway somewhere no doubt."

Schwartz shouts into the snowstorm outside and two soldiers appear. He instructs one to stand guard at the door and another in the hallway.

“I have decided I will sleep here,” Schwartz says, pointing at the armchair. “We have an early start tomorrow and a long journey ahead of us.”

Schwartz fetches a bag and returns with blankets which he throws onto the armchair.

“Goodnight,” he says, then his face changes suddenly, as if realizing a deception. He places his hand on the radiator and grins.

“Warm!,” says Schwartz. “Clearly Prague is not as deprived of supplies as the people insist. It is so very lovely and warm in here Franz.

“He’s warming our hearts,” says Amelia.

Schwartz smiles at Franz. “He is warming our hearts, indeed.”

•

Hlavni Nadrazi Station is alive with activity. Large speaker horns on the roof make urgent-sounding announcements and soldiers crowd everywhere. Amelia wears a thick coat and a large fur hat that covers her ears. It is tied tight under her chin.

Her father talks to a group of soldiers and railway workers

about how to hoist the Mechanical Man onto the train. A small crane is wheeled across the platform and the men begin to tie ropes around the large wooden box that houses the Mechanical Man.

While the men attach the ropes, Amelia notices a boy around her age stood by the newspaper stand. He is dressed scruffily, his trouser legs are horribly dirty, as are his shoes. His jacket looks much too thin for the cold.

He catches Amelia's eye and waves. Amelia looks away. When she turns back the boy is looking hurriedly about himself. He steps suddenly into the path of a soldier, who collides with him and nearly falls over.

"Hey!" shouts the soldier. "Get out of here." He shoos the boy away and continues down the platform in an angry stride.

Amelia looks back at the boy, who has stepped back into a doorway and is now holding a pocket watch. She thinks the boy looks quite handsome in an odd way. He catches her eye again and holds the watch up to her, shaking it proudly. Amelia slowly raises a hand and gives a small wave back.

There is a shout from the other side of the platform and Amelia sees the angry soldier running back and blowing a whistle.

"My pocket watch! Stop!" he shouts. "The little wretch! Thief!"

The boy is startled. He darts out of the doorway and runs across the station, followed by the soldier. Amelia sees the boy

run across the street, narrowly missing a cart. He is quick and nimble. A single pistol shot echoes through the station. Amelia's heart jumps. The boy trips in the snow, falls and lies perfectly still. The soldier runs up to him and pulls the pocket watch from the boy's hand.

The train's whistle blows loudly and Amelia turns, startled.

“All aboard!” a railway worker shouts.

Schwartz picks Amelia up and lifts her into the carriage. She feels like she is in a dream, being propelled by invisible hands into a strange future. Her feet feel unsteady in the carriage. Schwartz carries her to her seat and the train begins to pull away from the station. She turns to look back out of the window. She can see the boy's body, alone in the street.

Now the boy is getting smaller and smaller as the train leaves. Now he is a tiny speck. Amelia looks away for a moment, then turns back.

The boy has disappeared.

•

“What a terrible country,” Schwartz says, looking out of the train window into the snow. “Of course, I mean you no offense Franz, but you must see what I mean. If only the people of Czechoslovakia would understand that Hitler’s motive is to embrace them, not to fight them. Perhaps you do not trouble yourself with the war through Franz? It must be difficult work building your machines? I wish I could entertain such a distraction. And your daughter, also a fine chess player I think?”

“She enjoys it,” says Franz. “You are yourself a player?”

“Thank you. Yes, I am considered a great player, and was in fact ranked third in a youth chess championship when I was younger.”

Schwartz whoops loudly across the carriage at this, beating his hand on the small table in front of him.

“Tea?” asks a guard, poking his head through the door to the carriage.

Schwartz ushers the guard in and indicates that Amelia and her father should be given tea and a sandwich. Amelia stares down at her sandwich before picking it up. The bread is curiously soft, quite unlike the hard, tough bread that she is used to in Prague. She bites into it and her mouth feels like it might explode with pleasure. Flavors of fresh lettuce and a crisp tomato spill out across her tongue.

Schwartz notices her delight.

“You will find Berlin infinitely more civilized than

Czechoslovakia” he says. “When the people of Europe embrace their shared destiny, the Reich will provide. If the people of Prague would think more about purity and the national interest, and less about petty resistance,” Schwartz continues, licking butter from his fingers, “then they might have nice sandwiches too.”

“You were ranked third, Herr Schwartz? Why didn’t you win the chess championship?” asks Amelia.

“I’m sorry, Herr Schwartz, she’s very tired,” Amelia’s father says. “Let’s talk more of the reich.”

“No, no,” says Schwartz, waving his hand in the air. “It is a very good question, Fräulein, and it would be my very great pleasure to explain this.”

Schwartz dabs his lips with the corner of his napkin and settles deeper into his seat.

“When I was a boy—a few years older than you, Amelia—there was no place for chess in our family. My parents were, I’m afraid to say, a little ignorant. But my father owned a small restaurant in Prenzlauer Berg and men would come to play chess on the tables outside. It was very hot in those summers, and I’d sit in the shade under the canopy of the restaurant and watch them. Often one would pass me a basket of bread, or some sausage, or some steak. There was a lovely steak there, and a delicious lemon tart...”

Amelia looks at her father and makes a face like she is drifting to sleep. Her father nudges her.

“...and so often meringue. A delicious meringue. Now and again one of the men would call me over to the table and give some instruction on the game. ‘Look here’, they might say, ‘see how Herr Gunther’s Queen is so vulnerable? In three moves I will have him destroyed.’ Then Herr Gunther might whisper to me, ‘watch this.’ Then he would quickly force a new position and win the game.

“Of course I hardly understood, but sometimes they would let me make a move for them.

“At the beginning I barely knew what I was doing. So, I became an amusement for some of them.”

“Let little Hauke Schwartz make the next move,’ one would shout.

“I would hurry over to the table, size up the game, and make a move. But after a while I got rather good at it — I began to see where the game was moving, what the options were, how things might develop. Oh, mein Gott! Is that strawberry jam?”

Schwartz reaches his plump hand into the passing tea trolley and it emerges gripping a selection of jams and butters.

“What an interesting story,” says Amelia, staring out of the train window.

“And how did you come to enter the chess championships, Herr Schwartz?” asks her father.

“Every school in Germany held a chess heat, where players could compete for a place,” says Schwartz. “We have long been

a country of great minds, and what better way to craft a great mind than the pursuit of such a glorious sport. German minds are the greatest minds.”

The train grinds to a stop and Schwartz's jam and tea tumbles onto his lap, smearing him in food.

“What is this?” shouts Schwartz, “I cannot tolerate this ineptitude any more.”

The guard appears, looking flustered.

“My great apologies, Herr Schwartz,” the guard says. “We must stop here to allow another train to pass. There is a freight route on the same line. We have pulled into a siding.”

“A freight train?” asks Schwartz. “Then it must pull into the siding and we must pass it.”

“It is a very long train, Herr Schwartz, and we are a short train,” says the guard quietly, staring only at his feet—as if something very important were down there. “My apologies, Herr Schwartz.”

After a long moment, Schwartz sighs.

“We would not stand for this in Germany. The railways in Berlin do not stop except in stations,” Schwartz says to Amelia.

The carriage begins to shake.

“The freight train,” says the guard.

Amelia looks out of the window. A large shadow begins to creep across the glass. Then a deep, boomy whistle reverberates and an engine pulls into view, blocking out what is left of the evening light.

Slowly, the hulking metal frame of the passing train engine pulls past, throwing huge plumes of smoke against the window, leaving a black dust behind that gives the impression of sudden nightfall. Amelia presses her nose to the window glass and cups her hands around her eyes. She sees black swirling clouds and occasional glimpses of something in the smog.

Amelia hears Schwartz describing his childhood chess matches, he sounds distant. So very distant.

She looks further into the dark, spotting a face staring back at her an inch from her own. She recoils for a moment before realizing it is her own reflection. Amelia smiles and her reflection smiles back, but inside her reflection is the now face of another, she looks closer and sees an old woman peering out at her from the freight train, then disappearing into the blackness. Amelia cups her hands even tighter around her eyes and waits.

Then she sees them.

Faces staring back at her, appearing in the darkness for a moment before they are snatched away again. Old, tired faces. Some of them on bodies too small for such old faces. They peer out at her from between gaps in the carriages. Staring back at her from inside the smoke are thin, terrified people. Hundreds of them, thin and ragged. There for a moment, then whipped away into the smoke. Amelia turns to her father.

“Táta, look!” she says.

Her father leans across and peers into the darkness. Herr Schwartz, having located his jam and butter on the carriage floor, is preparing a slice of toast.

“I can't see anything, Amelia,” her father says.

“There really is nothing to see, Franz,” says Schwartz, taking a large bite from the toast. “Guard, can you help us?”

A curtain is pulled down across the window.

“That better, sir?” asks the guard.

“Some toast?” Schwartz asks Amelia.

She looks down at her lap for a very long time. Soon the train begins to move again.

“Four hours to Berlin,” says the guard.

Schwartz dismisses him with a wave, closes his eyes, tips his head back, and soon begins to snore loudly. Crumbs of sandwich stuck in his beard.

•

Goebbels stands in the military ward at Beelitz-Heilstätten hospital. A nurse introduces Goebbels to another patient.

“And this is General Behringer, recently wounded on the Eastern Front,” says the nurse. “Behringer crawled four miles and raised the alarm at another outpost, saving the battle.”

Goebbels looks at Beringer, the soldier's bed surrounded by flowers; Beringer's wife; and a journalist from the newspaper. Goebbels feels a wave of disgust creep over him.

“Four miles?” Goebbels says. “Crawling?”

“Herr Goebbels is here to present you with a medal of honor,” the nurse says to Beringer. Beringer sneezes and coughs up blood.

Goebbels takes a step back and tosses the medal of honor onto the bed.

“Germany thanks you,” says Goebbels

The journalist takes a photo.

“No, no. The light is terrible,” says Goebbels. “Stand on the other side of the bed and open the curtains so that the light will fall more flatteringly across the scene. What camera is that?”

“It is a Leica Rangefinder, Herr Goebbels,” says the journalist

“And the lens?”

“Fifty millimeter.”

“This is a fine choice. Bring the flowers into shot though.” Goebbels sweeps up the flowers on Beringer's bedside table. The glass vase smashes to the floor.

“And put the flowers here. Scattered about on the bed, says Goebbels,” throwing the flowers onto the bed, “to elevate the mis-en-scène. We need atmosphere.”

A man groans loudly in the next bed over.

“What is it?” shouts Goebbels.

“Our apologies, Herr Goebbels,” says the nurse. “A badly wounded soldier I’m afraid. He has lost his legs. They were amputated just this morning.”

Another loud moan echoes through the ward.

“Is the noise necessary?” asks Goebbels. “The newspaper are here and I hardly think they want to hear this. Have him moved.”

“But Herr Goebbels, he is in a very bad condition I must advise that he—“

“Have him moved.”

“Herr Goebbels,” says the journalist. “There is no need to move the man, he is no distraction at all.

“Move him!” snaps Goebbels. “Now.”

The journalist makes a note on his pad. Goebbels snatches it out of his hands.

“What is this? What is the purpose of this note?”

“I... I am just documenting,” says the journalist.

“Any man who has a residue of honor will be very careful not to become a journalist,” says Goebbels. “There is no purpose to taking notes. What could you hope to document that will not be present in my official dictation of this piece to you this afternoon? Do you doubt the the integrity of the Reich's account? Do you want to pollute the people with...”

Goebbels slaps the journalist hard across the face with his own notepad.

“...this unofficial account?”

“No, Herr Goebbels. Of course, you are correct.”

“Try to think of your newspaper,” says Goebbels, “as a grand piano on which the government can play.”

Goebbels throws the journalist’s notebook out of the hospital window.

“Perfect!” he shouts. “Let the photography begin.”

Goebbels puts his arm around the patient’s shoulders and holds the Medal of Honor up to the camera. Flash bulbs go off and Goebbels smiles. When the photographs stop, Goebbels blinks in the ward. The wounded man coughs up more blood.

Now, in the doorway of the ward—difficult to see in the residue of the flashes—Goebbels can make out Schwartz standing with a man and a little girl. They walk towards him.

“Heil Hitler!” says Schwartz.

Goebbels slightly raises his arm in salute.

“This is the man who has made the mechanical chess playing man. His name is Fritz,” says Schwartz.

Goebbels looks down at Amelia.

“And this?” he asks.

“I’m Amelia,” Amelia says.

“The inventor’s daughter,” says Schwartz.

Goebbels continues staring down at Amelia, then stamps his foot as if drawing himself out of a trance. “Well, where is the machine then? Bring it up.”

“Into the hospital, Herr Goebbels?”

“Yes, yes. Bring it here. We have many sick and wounded men in this hospital. Let this be the test of your machine. If it can entertain these men and distract them from their pain and misery then it may be worthy of further investigations. Yes?”

“I will prepare the machine,” says Amelia’s father

As Amelia and Franz leave the ward. Goebbels pulls Schwartz aside.

“Schwartz, I trust that this is no folly.”

“No folly, Herr Goebbels. I think the machine will impress you.”

“Please don’t think things about me, Schwartz. It disgusts me to think there is a version of me in there. In deine kopf.”

Goebbels taps on the side of Schwartz’s head.

•

In the secrecy of the van parked outside Beelitz-Heilstätten, Amelia climbs through the small door in the side of the Mechanical Man and crouches down inside. Her father shuts the door with a little click and complete darkness swallows her up. She can hear her father open the van doors and ask Nazi soldiers if they will help him carry The Mechanical Man. Amelia soon has the sensation of rocking and jolting as the

Mechanical Man is carried up the long staircase leading to the recreation ward.

Amelia imagines she is lost at sea, fallen off a giant ship and now adrift in a tiny box on a huge ocean.

There is a thump and the box comes to rest. Amelia hears muffled voices, then light streams through the chessboard's one-way mirror into the box below. She lights a candle for more light and grips the mechanical levers with her little hands, sweat beading on her palms. She peers up through the glass of the chessboard, but nobody is yet sat in the chair.

Amelia turns and looks out through the tiny gap in the side of the Mechanical Man.

The recreation ward is long and grand with high ceilings. It looks rather like a ballroom, but instead of dancers there are men in hospital gowns scattered here and there, some slumped in chairs; others shuffling about on crutches. Some are reading, some just staring into a blank space, many of them are, much to Amelia's surprise, playing chess.

At the end of the ward, Amelia can see a large leaderboard. At the top is written "The People's Grand Chess championship," and in chalk below are the names of men. As she watches, one of the men playing chess lets out a gleeful cry, staggers to his feet and makes his way over to the leaderboard. He rubs out the name of one man, presumably his opponent and looks proudly back at the group. She hears Goebbels' voice, shrill and overhead.

“A mind that understands chess, understands strategy,” Goebbels says, “and, so, what better way for you men to keep yourselves busy when recuperating, than to keep your minds fierce and alert. Who will play our mechanical visitor then?” His voice rises to a shout, “Men! Who will play our visitor at chess?”

Amelia watches the patients turn in their seats. One of them stands up and shuffles towards the Mechanical Man.

“Please, take a seat,” says Goebbels.

A shadow passes across the chess board and Amelia looks up through the glass to see the face of a young soldier. He has a fresh scar running across his forehead and dark circles around his eyes. His hands slowly arrange the chess pieces across the board — it seems like a struggle for him, as if his fingers won't bend as he wants them to.

The young soldier nudges the last few pieces gracelessly into position. After a moment, he fixes his gaze and makes his first move — lifting a rook in a quite precarious fashion, barely clearing the tops of the pawns before landing it.

Gripping the levers, Amelia directs the Mechanical Man to move a pawn two space forwards. The Mechanical Man's arms are slow and graceless, not unlike the wounded soldier's arms.

‘Wouldn't it be funny,’ Amelia thinks, ‘if the soldier had a little girl hiding inside him too?’ Her amusement turns to terror: she hears a tapping on the outside of the machine.

“Very impressive, Fritz. What have you got inside here —

how does the machine work?” says Goebbels.

“It’s very sensitive,” her father says. “Please, let me demonstrate.”

The false-side of the machine is unfastened and Amelia senses that her father and Goebbels are peering inside. Amelia blows out the candle and keeps perfectly still in her hiding space. The cogs of the machine begin to whirr and turn. Amelia loosens her grip on the levers.

“A sophisticated computing machine,” Goebbels says. “We have similar machines the the Ministry, I’m sure. But I am surprised. Surprised that it is from Prague.”

Amelia hears the false panel closing and she re-lights the candle. The soldier makes another move, and Amelia directs the Mechanical Man’s hands to react. She realizes that the solider is playing a defensive game in a pattern that she recognizes.

Amelia feigns a defensive approach, leading the soldier to a quick defeat as he becomes increasingly confident in his skill. She sacrifices piece after piece and the solider relaxes into the game more and more.

“Can’t beat good old flesh and blood!” the solider announces, moving a castle into position. “Check!”

Amelia’s plan has worked. The solider has left himself wide open to her bishop. She moves the Mechanical man’s arms to nudge the piece into place.

“Checkmate,” Amelia whispers to herself.

The solider stares down at the board. Amelia watches as realization crosses his face. He shakes his head.

“My, my,” he says. “Quite remarkable. Beaten by a machine! Well can we shake hands?”

The Mechanical Man does not move.

“Checkmate.” says Goebbels.

“This is quite something, Fritz,” says Goebbels. “The calculations must be quite advanced. The mechanical man is presumably speculating on thousands of possible game plans. What is your trade?”

“I am an electrician and carpenter,” says Amelia’s father. “I mostly make tables and fix radios.”

“Making tables and fixing radios!” shouts Goebbels, laughing. He then goes very quiet for a minute, concentrating hard on something.

“Well, my carpenter friend,” says Goebbels, “in five days we have a special event in Berlin, one that I should now like you to attend. I will give a speech in the Sportpalast — you know the *Sportpalast* I assume? Our big political stadium. A marvelous arena, the capacity is fourteen-thousand and it is home to the best-trained audience one could find.

“Your invention is rather magnificent, and it must be seen by the masses. To think that it was created under Nazi rule; fantastic. It must have a source of profound inspiration for you Herr Fritz, yes? To know that your engineering skills were being fostered by the Reich. Of course Prague is still under

acquisition, and there was all that nonsense about the food shortages. But, really, it demonstrates what little food a great mind requires to build such wonderful things.”

Goebbels begins to pace about the recreation ward.

“Schwartz, have the inventor and his daughter made comfortable. Give them an apartment at The Hotel Adlon. They must rest before dinner. And take this mechanical contraption to the University. Fritz can work on it there. Call Speer as well. Have him meet us this evening. I want him to see this.”

Amelia feels a sensation of weightlessness as the Mechanical Man is lifted into the air and carried down the stairs. She hears faint voices and occasionally a distant moan. The temperature inside the box suddenly changes and Amelia can hear the crunch of snow under the boots of the soldiers carrying the machine. There is a thump. The Mechanical Man comes to rest. Amelia peers out through the gap in the side of the box. She glimpses two SS men stood in the rear doors of a large truck.

“Where to?” one of the SS men asks the other.

“University,” says the other. “Speer.”

There is a shout from the other side of the street and the men look over to see what the commotion is.

“That’s a union man,” says one of the SS men. “I recognize him.”

They both walk out of Amelia’s view and she seizes her

chance. She unfastens the side of the Mechanical Man and clambers out, closing the small door behind her.

“Fräulein Amelia!” shouts a voice.

Amelia stares out into the bright street. It is Schwartz.

“There you are!” says Schwartz. “Didn’t like the sick men? They’re harmless enough. It’s war, nothing more sinister than that. Now, come out of the van, we don’t want you damaging the machine or getting lost. There is a quite fantastic cake shop nearby. You will be delighted by Berlin. Soon all of Europe will share its plentiful treats.”

•

“Your apartment,” says Schwartz, pushing open the ornate doors. Amelia takes off her shoes and steps into the room. The carpet is thick and deep and her toes curl into the plat. A chandelier hangs from the centre of the ceiling and casts a speckled light.

“Do we sleep here?” asks Amelia, looking around the room. “I will take this one,” she says, slumping down on a chaise longue.

“You can sleep there if you like,” says Schwartz, crossing the room. “But, there are, of course, bedrooms.”

Schwartz draws back a large velvet curtain to reveal a

corridor with more rooms leading off it.

“There are three bedrooms, take your pick.”

Amelia stands up in disbelief. The apartment appears to stretch out further than the central square in Prague. She walks across the carpet, down the corridor and peers into the first bedroom. The room is spectacular, wallpapered in a rich, dark green. And in the middle is a large wooden fort, draped in thick satin. She treads carefully across to the fort and pulls back a drape to see inside. The inside of the fort is dark, but as her eyes adjust she realizes it is not a fort at all, but the biggest bed she has ever seen.

“What do you think of Berlin now?” Schwartz asks.

Amelia is about to launch herself into a speech about how lovely and beautiful and impossibly grand the apartment is, when she catches her father's expression. He is looking far away, out of the apartment into the night.

She thinks of Prague and the boy lying motionless in the snow by the station. Amelia feels a chill and doesn't feel much like making a speech anymore. The room seems somehow uglier, the green no longer right and the large bed too big, much bigger than any bed she would like to sleep in — she would much prefer her room in Prague, with its window that rattles in the storms, her books, and the metal bird on the sill. Amelia turns back to Schwartz and says, “Berlin is quite nice.”

Schwartz looks at Amelia for a moment, confused by her change of mood. Then something on the nearby nightstand

distracts him and he quickly marches over, picks up a black folder and holds it aloft.

“Ah, room service!” he says, waving the folder. “A most delightful invention. A *German* invention, of course.”

He flips the folder open to reveal sheafs of paper bound together.

“Anything the heart desires. Boundless culinary treats for the weary traveller. Crémé Brulé even! I wonder if—” He stops for a moment, deep in thought. “I believe the kitchen closes at six tonight and it is...” Schwartz checks his watch, “...time for me to eat. Someone will fetch you to attend Herr Goebbels’ party this evening. Goodnight.”

Schwartz marches quickly out of the apartment, leaving the door wide open and a pattern of muddy boot prints down the hallway. Amelia’s father closes the door to the apartment.

They are alone.

Amelia feels a sadness come over her—a sadness that seems to have no place in such grand and magnificent surroundings.

Looking about at the paintings and decorated rooms, she has never felt further from home.

Her father begins to search through a large chest of drawers in the living room. Amelia sits on the carpet and watches him forage. There are all kinds of things inside the drawers. Old books, a pair of tennis rackets and a bottle of half-drunk rum. Finally he stops for a moment, then pulls out a box and blows the dust off the top of it.

“Here we go,” he says. “Look hard enough and there is always a chessboard.”

He unfolds the board and arranges the pieces neatly across it.

Amelia doesn't much want to play chess in this strange airless room.

Her father looks up at her. Amelia walks across the carpet and moves a rook forwards. After a few minutes of playing she has quite forgotten the apartment, and her sadness at being so far from their home in Prague. There is no room in her head for these thoughts now. She maps out the ways in which the game might evolve—what her father's next move will be—whether she should play offensively, or with restraint, measuring every decision carefully before pouncing. Her concentration is focused. She sees only the neat succession of white and black squares; the unique character of each piece.

Amelia feels the personality of the ivory figurines as she considers their actions. Take the Queen, for example. Amelia thinks the Queen is decisive, powerful and slightly arrogant. The Bishop: he is grand and pompous, but well-exercised, athletic and nimble, able to travel huge distances in one leap. The Castle: to Amelia, he seems to be the Bishop's opposite. Though able to travel large distances, the Castle's hefty body forces him into a groaning rumble across squares, moving only in crude compass directions, dragging his foundations behind him in a reluctant shuffle. The Pawns: to her these seem

changeable in character: some are pathetic, while some are smart, like spies, depending on what she whispers to them.

Amelia might sacrifice one pawn and think very little of him, while at other times she might become oddly attached to a pawn that has fought its way across the board. Then she will feel somewhat guilty later about sacrificing him in the game.

'All these ideas are rather ridiculous,' thinks Amelia, but she smiles.

She imagines the two opposing armies of chess figurines might actually relate to real armies, somewhere in a fantastical far away land. When Amelia moves a piece across the board, she sometimes imagines vast armies being drawn into motion in this fantastical land she cannot see. These armies are not sure where the instruction to act has come from, but they execute the moves with complete faith and confidence. They know the command to charge or withdraw has its origin further up the line, somewhere far off; powerful and indecipherable. What does Amelia's giant hand mean to them?

If a pawn was to break rank, crawl out of the trenches, make its way across the muddy fields, under the skies thick with cannon smoke, then follow the chain of command back far enough, tracing the path of the instruction, questioning rooks, bishops, kings.

"Who told you to do this? Where did the command originate?"

The other chess soldiers would point from one to the next,

leading the pawn further and further up ranks to the source, until he might reach the edge of the battlefield and find the fingers of a little girl, Amelia, sat on the floor, in an apartment in Berlin, playing a game of chess with her father. The pawn would sit on the carpet in his wet, heavy uniform and stare up at her in awe and confusion.

There is a single loud knock at the door and a soldier walks in.

“Herr Goebbels requests that you join him at dinner,” the soldier says.

Amelia stands up from the board and pulls on her heavy coat and boots. The three of them plunge out into the cold Berlin streets.

•

Goebbels finds himself in a troubled state of mind. Dinner with the actress, Lyla, began well enough, but he found her increasingly frustrating.

He has begun to suspect she is much too young to appreciate the full significance of his invitations.

Many women in Berlin would have been eager to take Lyla’s place at dinner, but she seemed barely impressed. However,

how refreshing it was to meet a girl so unlike the usual fawning type that tried constantly to impress him with talk of their service in the Hitler Youth.

Lyla spoke very little of politics, and indeed of anything that seemed of much importance to Goebbels, but he nonetheless found her peculiar and hypnotic. It was as if something danced inside her that in himself had fallen quiet. He felt that if he could observe her long enough, that same thing in him might suddenly spring to its feet. The notion was naturally ridiculous to him, but it persisted.

After an unobjectionable Lobster, Lyla's relentless gossiping about this director or that actor had calmed Goebbels and he found himself falling into a calm. But, then dessert had arrived, and Lyla summoned the impertinence to ask if his wife, Magda, was keen on the theatre.

Goebbels had then excused himself and walked to the bathrooms, where, upon entering he kicked the towel bin hard, in a fury—startling a man exiting the stalls—who he recognized as a junior SS member. They locked eyes for a moment, then the man hurried out.

Now, standing with Lyla in the party at the Ballhaus, Goebbels feels an irritation building in him. He reaches for Lyla's hand and she lightly squeezes his in reply. He feels his mood soften. But then Lyla laughs in delight and spins around.

She lets go of his hand and turns to embrace an elderly man

who has walked into the party. The elderly man has a face deep with lines, a long white beard, and widening in the middle of it: a large grin.

Goebbels hates him instantly.

“Lyla, my dear!” says the elderly man.

“Joseph, you must meet Wilhelm Pfeiffer,” says Lyla. “Wilhelm is a magnificent film director, and of course,” she says, turning to Pfeiffer, “you know Joseph’s work.”

“All of Berlin and Europe know his work,” says Pfeiffer. “A production on a scale I cannot imagine. A global scale. And what a cast. Such fabulous costumes!” He laughs.

Goebbels stares at him.

“Well, how fortunate that two such wonderful men should be in the same room as me. I feel quite dizzy and overwhelmed,” says Lyla.

Goebbels notices that Pfeiffer’s hand is outstretched. Goebbels has no intention of touching the man and he turns away, but, at that moment, Lyla puts her arm around Goebbels and he feels something may be at risk if he moves away now. His hand feels as if an intolerable weight is hanging off its end, but he raises his arm and shakes Pfeiffer’s outstretched palm.

“Where do you work?” Goebbels hears himself say.

“In the studios at UFA. And I hope one day to have the pleasure of working with Lyla here. She is a very talented actress.”

“She has a talent,” says Goebbels.

“Yes,” says Pfeiffer. “Her eyes are perfect for the stage. So wide and glistening. As if they hold intolerable, painful, wonderful secrets somewhere in them.”

Lyla touches her lip and smiles.

“It is, of course an illusion, is it not, Herr Goebbels?”

“What is an illusion?” Goebbels says.

“Well, the audience will, in eyes like these, simply see what they want to see, and not what is there at all.”

“I see everything quite clearly,” says Goebbels.

“What I mean is: all film is a deception, a manipulation of emotion, and Lyla’s are the eyes for such a task.”

“My eyes...” says Lyla, “...would like to speak a word on the matter. They think you see too much in them.”

“Well, what have you let into them, my dear? What sadness have they seen?” asks Pfeiffer.

Pfeiffer looks at Lyla sadly for a moment, then spots something in the room behind Goebbels: A little girl is standing in the doorway, wrapped in a thick winter jacket and holding what looks like a chessboard.

“It seems we have a lovelier guest this evening even than Lyla,” says Pfeiffer. “Come and join us, young lady.” He beckons to the little girl and she walks forwards.

“Hello,” says Pfeiffer.

“Hello, my name is Amelia,” says Amelia, holding out her hand to Pfeiffer.

He crouches down and shakes it enthusiastically.

“This is Amelia,” Pfeiffer announces to Goebbels and Lyla. “She is a famous magician.”

“No, I’m not,” says Amelia, smiling. “I’m a girl.”

“Then where did this come from?” asks Denreich, reaching down and pulling a handkerchief from Amelia’s ear. “That really is quite an extraordinary and magical thing for an ordinary little girl to be carrying in her ear, wouldn’t you agree?”

Amelia smiles.

Goebbels finds himself annoyed by the sudden appearance of the inventor’s daughter, but there is something fascinating about her. As if she hasn’t the slightest understanding of the occasion. She reminds him, he realizes, of Lyla and it strikes him at that moment, that the two of them look much alike.

“You dress very well,” says Lyla. “Your hat is delightful. I wish I had one like it.”

“Where is your father?” Goebbels asks Amelia. “Is he setting up the machine? Tell them to bring it in here and place it in front of the fireplace. There are a great number of guests here who will be fascinated to watch his clockwork man in action.”

“A clockwork man?” asks Pfeiffer.

“A clockwork man that is able to play chess,” says Goebbels. “It is an extraordinary new piece of Nazi engineering, brought all the way from Prague just yesterday.”

“Lyla is also an excellent chess player,” says Pfeiffer. “All the

actresses play it during set-ups at the studios. It's quite the fashion and Lyla has quite the reputation."

"Well, Lyla," says Goebbels. "It seems you have hidden this talent from me. So *many* things seem hidden."

"I play a little. Nothing of note," says Lyla.

"I must help my father prepare the machine," announces Amelia.

"Yes, you must," says Pfeiffer. "It sounds like very exciting work."

Goebbels watches Amelia walk across the room and out through the mahogany doors. He stares for a moment into the corridor. Something confuses him about the child. Perhaps it is her upbringing—Prague is known for its troublemakers.

She is quite unlike his own daughters.

Goebbels has little time to reflect on this because Lyla has taken his hand in her's again and is dragging him towards a group of quite unpleasant looking women gathered about Chief Architect, Albert Speer.

Goebbels sees that Speer has brought along a large architectural model of the Volkshalle, which Speer has placed on the long table by the window. Speer is narrating, at great length, and to a rapt audience of Berlin dilettantes, the details of the building.

"These large columns are pure marble," says Speer. "And when it is built, you will walk down the grand promenade, here," he gestures down the middle of the model. "And the

view will be quite extraordinary. Hitler says that this huge domed assembly hall will acquire great holy significance and become a hallowed shrine. The full might and elegance of the German government will be seen there, cast in stone and more magnificent than anything before. Nobody can contest our ambitions, and what better evidence of our resolve than to gaze down the promenade and see with your own eyes this unassailable might.”

“Isn't it rather lovely?” says one of the women, adjusting her necklace and staring full-eyed at Speer. Then, very slowly, fixated, she repeats his words, “un-*assail*-able.”

“Indeed,” says Speer. “The oculus of the dome can contain entire rotunda of Hadrian's Pantheon and the dome of St. Peter's Basilica. It is my *Monsterbau*. There is room for two-hundred-thousand people.”

Goebbels shakes his hand out of Lyla's grip and begins to pace around the model. He crouches down, so that his eye-level matches that of the tiny street, and peers down the promenade.

Goebbels raps his fingers on the table, three quick taps. Then he stands up and looks at Speer.

“The promenade is not wide enough, Speer,” says Goebbels. “It is, of course, elegant as always, but I think we should make the passage grander, more fitting for our nation's ambition.”

Goebbels reaches over the model and attempts to push back the structures lining the street. The tiny replica buildings resist

his efforts. They are firmly glued to the board it is mounted on.

Goebbels pulls harder but the model still resists his effort, so he uses both hands and, with tremendous force, tears buildings off the model in, taking with them long strips of paper and simulated grass in a great shower of pieces. Tiny marble columns splinter and skitter across the polished wooden floor of the ballroom.

Speer stands perfectly still and watches as Goebbels goes about his destruction.

“Yes, I think it would look significantly improved if the two Breker sculptures were moved here,” Goebbels says, adjusting the ruins. “And we should also consider improving the view here.”

Goebbels’ fingers scramble over the model. “If we remove these two pillars,” he says, pushing hard on the model causing two supporting columns to snap out with a click, “then the view will be quite remarkable.”

“And these people here,” Goebbels says, noticing the collection of miniature German citizens standing at the gates of the building. “They should not loiter here and spoil the clean lines of your architecture, Speer. Instead we must insist they walk around the edge of the amphitheater.”

He reaches for the tiny people, but they are glued in place. He pulls hard and snaps them off the board, many of them leave their legs behind, two little sticks in tiny puddles of hard glue. Goebbels then delicately scatters the legless plastic bodies

around the edge of the amphitheater and stands back to admire the model. “Much better. Don’t you think Speer?”

Speer looks at the model and walks quickly away. Goebbels follows Speer into the party, leaving the women to pick over the model. He hears their voices fade as he crosses the ballroom and finds Speer by a table filled with cake and hams.

“I hope you did not find my design suggestions unwelcome, Speer,” says Goebbels.

Speer begins to consider the selection of hams very carefully. Then he sighs.

“Herr Goebbels,” Speer says. “Perhaps these discussions would be best left for the planning meetings. I felt somewhat overwhelmed at your interventions just then.”

Goebbels puts his hand gently over Speer’s eyes and whispers furiously into Speer’s ear, “The night is my best friend, Speer. It calms the storm in my soul and it lets the guiding stars rise. Perhaps you may find calm there too?”

After a moment, Goebbels removes his hand from the architect’s eyes. Speer stares at Goebbels.

“On another matter, I have something that may interest you,” Goebbels says. “A man from Prague is here and with him a clockwork man that can play chess.”

Speer prods at a ham with his fork.

“I can see this does not excite you at all, Speer, and nor did it excite me until I saw the machine play. It can anticipate moves, perhaps five or six moves in advance. It opens with a Stonewall

Attack then might transition into Petrov's Defence or the Vienna Game. It is quite remarkable. It was brought to me for the purpose of entertainment, and I expected to dismiss it as a toy, but it can play, Speer, it can play excellently. So, while observing this clockwork man, I reminded myself of our project."

Speer stops examining the ham and turns to face Goebbels.

"Herr Goebbels, I must insist that you do not discuss the project in public! I implicitly trust the guests but—"

"My dear Speer," says Goebbels, "there is no need to discuss anything further now. I share your concern for secrecy. You will see the machine play, and if you agree, I will have it moved to the university basement and instruct the inventor to collaborate with you. I think you may find the machine is extremely relevant to the ambitions of the Reich."

Speer goes to speak, but just then a hush falls across the ballroom. There is a small commotion at the doors and four SS men shuffle in, carrying the Mechanical Man on their shoulders, like a Roman Emperor.

Speer's eyes flicker to life.

"Place it over there," shouts Goebbels, "on the stage".

•

The guests shuffle forwards to get a better look at the Mechanical Man as he is lowered onto the stage. Amelia's father walks around the machine, carefully adjusting dials, then he arranges the chess pieces on the board. The guests whisper at each other; food lies abandoned on plates; drinks sleep in palms; ice cubes melt in anticipation.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” says Amelia's father. “I am proud to present to you The Mechanical Man. A clockwork machine that can play chess, and not any chess, but the very finest chess. Can I ask for a volunteer from the audience to play the man?”

A guest standing next to Goebbels, holding a large plate of cheeses, raises his hand. Other guests follow. Women nudge their husbands and more hands rise up in a sea. Fritz looks out across the ballroom and catches Goebbels' eye.

Under the bright lights of the stage it is difficult to make out the faces of the crowd, but Fritz can see Goebbels is staring, not at the Mechanical Man, but across the ballroom. He follows the line of Goebbels' gaze towards the windows where, in the dim light of a chandelier, is stood a beautiful woman in a deep red dress.

Her hand is not raised, but as Fritz looks at her, she meets his gaze and lifts her hand slightly from her waist. For a moment he feels frozen. The woman in the dress seems alone in the blackness of the audience, as if she were drowning in some impossibly dark oil. He blinks and focuses himself.

“Yes,” says Amelia's father. “The young woman in the red

dress. Please step forwards.”

There are a few grumbles from the crowd, hands flop down to rest at waists and a gentle applause breaks out. The guests part to make way as the woman crosses the room to the stage. Amelia's father offers her his hand. She takes it and pulls herself up onto the wooden platform where the Mechanical Man sits waiting. She turns to the audience and bows, blowing a kiss at Goebbels. He smiles weakly.

“Lyla,” says the woman, reaching out her hand to Amelia's father. He shakes it. It feels light and warm.

An unfamiliar calm washes over him and Fritz feels for a moment as if he might never let go of this girl's hand, but a second later finds himself standing behind the Mechanical Man with no recollection of how he got there. He looks down at the machine.

Lyla sits on the chair facing the Mechanical Man and waits.

“Please, Lyla,” says Fritz, “make your first move.”

The party falls silent again, and Lyla considers the board.

“Danish Gambit,” shouts someone at the back of the ballroom.

“No! Four Knights Game,” says a man near the front, a monocle clenched between his cheek and eyebrow.

Recognizing him, Lyla laughs. “I should like to play my own game, Commander Lehmann. Though I hear you are exquisite in battle, you must not treat everything as your war.”

Lehmann nods. “This evening, I fight only the cheese,” he

says, stabbing his fork at a hard chunk on his plate.

Lyla reaches for the knight, lets it hover over the board for a moment, and then places it in front of the pawns.

She relaxes back in her chair.

“Well, what do you make of that?” she asks the Mechanical Man.

The Mechanical man slowly raises an arm. Fritz looks out into the party and can see Goebbels whispering into the ear of the man stood next to him.

The Mechanical Man gently picks up a pawn and places it two squares towards the enemy line. The guests hush.

They game continues.

Lyla advances her knight, placing it where it may easily be taken. The mechanical man reaches forward and takes Lyla's knight. The guests applaud.

“How delightful,” says Lyla, clapping her hands.

Goebbels climbs onto the stage and walks behind the chair. He speaks quietly to Lyla.

”Don't be generous, Lyla. These people are here to see a show. Dazzle them.”

Lyla nods and moves a pawn forwards. *The Philidor Defense*, thinks the inventor. The game progresses intensely, Lyla's frivolity quickly evaporating. Soon, the game has the ballroom alive with chattering about the best position for Lyla to move in next.

“Quiet,” says Lyla. “He might hear you!” nodding towards

the Mechanical Man. “Can he hear?” she asks Amelia’s father.

“No,” he says. “It is only a machine.”

“Well then,” announces Goebbels loudly. “Let’s put it to a vote. Who here thinks that beautiful Lyla should sacrifice her queen and lure this clockwork man into a trap? And who thinks she should she retreat and use her bishop to put the pressure on?”

The guests call out from the ballroom.

“Your hands please,” shouts Goebbels. “The people’s will. Raise your arm if you think Lyla should sacrifice her queen?”

Three guests raise their arms.

“And those who think she should retreat?”

Thirty guests raise their arms.

Goebbels leans down and whispers into Lyla’s ear. She looks sad and moves the queen into place, sacrificing the piece to the clockwork man’s bishop. A few guests tut.

“The people’s will is the will of the Reich,” says Goebbels. “And the Reich does not retreat.”

The Mechanical Man raises his hand slowly and takes Lyla’s queen. Lyla moves again, taking a knight with her pawn. The Mechanical Man reaches out, appearing to spot a new position. Its hand moves a bishop quickly across the board, placing Lyla in checkmate.

Goebbels stamps his foot. “Scheiße!” He tenses his arms and turns pale. Amelia’s father takes a step away.

The air turns cold.

A few of the guests at the front of the stage push back on those behind them, trying to make space; planning an escape. Then, slowly, like a bomb reluctantly defusing itself, Goebbels turns up the corners of his mouth into a grin and begins to clap.

Slowly the grin becomes more relaxed, more authentic. The air warms. A few of the crowd applaud, then more, and soon the relieved clinking of drinks begin to erupt across the ballroom.

“Well done,” shouts Goebbels. “An excellent match. Truly excellent.”

He turns to Lyla, takes her hand and kisses it.

“Excellent,” he says to her.

“Thank you, Herr Goebbels,” says Lyla. “And now you must play. I hear you are superb.”

A voice at the back of the audience shouts.

“Yes, Herr Goebbels must play!”

Then another shouts.

“Play!” Other join it in chorus and Goebbels raises his arms to quiet them.

“I shall play this mechanical man in the Sportpalast in four days. You may all witness my skill then. And, I assure you, I shall beat him.”

“The machine is marvelous, but no match for Herr Goebbels,” shouts Commander Lehmann, still grasping his plate of cheese. “But, Herr Goebbels, why not play the

machine now *and* in the Sportpalast? Why not defeat it twice in demonstration?”

“I do not wish to spoil the show, Lehmann,” Goebbels says, “Four days.”

“Why won’t he play now?” slurs a voice from the back of the room.

“Yes, why not play now, Joseph?” asks Lyla. “The people clearly want—”

“I will play in the Sportpalast in three days.” Goebbels stops, raises his head suddenly, and appears to be listening intently to the air. There is a loud whistling sound, increasing rapidly in volume. The guests turn to look at each other.

•

Amelia peers out from inside the Mechanical Man. She can see Goebbels standing statue-like on the stage, one ear raised to the ceiling. There is blackness for a moment, then a furious shaking, as if an earthquake has struck the ballroom. Amelia hears a sharp whistling in her ears, and clamps her hands over them tightly. The earthquake stops and she peers out through the gap in her tiny box. She can see smoke and shadows, and hear screams that are somehow impossibly quiet, as if muffled by pillows.

There is another earthquake, this time it seems further away, a deep, powerful rumbling. Slowly sounds begin to regain their texture, shouts getting closer. The door to the Mechanical Man is wrenched open and Amelia stares up into the dense smoky stage. The figure of a man stands over the door to the Mechanical Man, he seems frantic, speaking loudly but indecipherably.

The figure pulls her out of the Mechanical Man with thick heavy hands that she recognizes immediately as her father's. He wraps her up and whisks her up through the smoke.

“Close the door,” Amelia shouts.

He reaches down and slams the Mechanical Man's door shut, and as he does so, Amelia sees a face over her father's shoulder, inches from her own. Through a gap in the smoke, Amelia stares into the eyes of the young woman she has just played chess against.

It is Lyla.

They look at each other in silence for a second. Something passes between them. Then Lyla vanishes into the smoke.

Amelia hears her father's voice, calming and deep. She lays her head on his shoulder and he carries her through the thick grey clouds, down a staircase and out onto the street. The air is cold, but a sweet relief. She coughs, her eyes streaming.

Her father holds her.

When she has calmed, Amelia looks around her. The street is filled with the sound of air-raid sirens. Goebbels is stood on

the road, shouting instructions to SS officers who rush off, pregnant with orders. He spots Amelia and marches quickly over.

“Have you seen Lyla?” he asks Amelia and Franz.

Amelia says nothing, but pushes her face into her father’s chest and imagines she is in her bed in Prague. If she were to wish this hard enough, to press her face hard enough into his chest then, when she lifts it off, that is where she will find herself, safe in her bed in their house, awoken from some terrible dream.

Someone shakes her hard.

“Where is Lyla?” Goebbels shouts, shaking Amelia.

Amelia feels herself drifting away. There is a shout from one of the SS men near the entrance to the building. Goebbels runs over to him and Amelia watches Lyla stumble out of the building, covered from head to toe in ash, her red dress stained black, and torn at the hem.

Goebbels shouts to the SS men to help her, but Lyla shoos them away. With an odd and elegant pride, she walks along the street toward Amelia and her father. While sirens blaze across the city and tiny burnt fragments of the red curtains from the ballroom fall about them like cherry blossom, she walks. Amelia thinks Lyla looks quite beautiful picking her way along the street in these dazed, uncertain steps. She looks like a wounded goddess. Lyla stops in front of Amelia.

“I saw you in the smoke,” Lyla says slowly, dreamily, like a

ghost. “I saw where you came from.” She slowly points a finger at Amelia, and then carefully, “Yes. You. I saw you in the smoke. You came from inside him.”

Amelia tenses. She cannot speak.

Lyla leans forwards, closer and closer to Amelia.

With her face an inch from Amelia’s, Lyla faints and collapses into the deep snow. Goebbels shouts and the SS men come running. They pick Lyla up and carry her to a car.

“She must have become lost in the smoke,” says Goebbels. He holds her hand for a moment, it feels cold and brittle. “I do hope the machine is not badly damaged. These air raids are so tiresome. I will have my men salvage what they can from the ballroom.”

Goebbels turns and climbs into the waiting car, its wheels spin for a moment before gripping in the thickening snow.

•

Goebbels sit in his office. He holds a syringe and draws liquid from a black vial. He has barely slept after the bombing last night. The syringe needle hovers above his arm.

“Herr Goebbels,” says Speer. “I feel this must remain a private indulgence for you. I will wait outside.”

“Come now, Speer! So timid! So squeemish. We are all doing it, no? Don’t pretend you’re some Buddha on a mountaintop. I have read your medical records. There’s barely

a man in here doesn't enjoy a squirt. Gobbels pushes the syringe needle into his arm.

"Mine is prescription," says Speer. "For my stomach problems."

"Yes, of course, for your *stomach problems*, Speer. There's nothing like a little *methamphetamine* to soothe the stomach. Our doctors are so generous. So very, very generous. Three times a day is it Speer?"

Speer looks around in a panic.

"Please! This is my private medical information," says Speer.

"Here I go," says Goebbels, thrilled.

Goebbels plunges the liquid from the syringe into himself and collapses forward onto the desk. Passed out.

"Herr Goebbels?"

Goebbels suddenly lurches upwards and shouts at the ceiling.

"No father, not the belt again, please god no, I'm bleeding. I can't take this... I'm just a little boy!"

"Sorry?" says Speer.

"Yes, Speer? Yes? Yes?" says Goebbels. "Tell me about the Mechanical Man. Tell me of dreams and wonders. I am here to be delighted."

"The Mechanical Man," says Speer, "as I'm sure you suspected, was badly damaged by the bombing raid, but the inventor leads me to believe that it can be repaired in time for your match at the Sportpalast."

Speer stops for a moment and pours himself a brandy from Goebbel's crystal decanter. He raises the decanter towards

Goebbels, who shakes his head. This movement triggers a sharp pain in Goebbels' leg, which he rubs hard and angrily.

“Something wrong? Herr Goebbels?” asks Speer.

“Nothing is wrong. Nothing is wrong. Delight me, Speer. Thrill me. Kiss me gently. Please, go on...”

“While the repairs are being made to the Mechanical Man, I have ordered the inventor to draw diagrams to show how the machine works. I hope they will be detailed enough to allow us to integrate his designs into the...”

Speer steps closer to Goebbels and lowers his voice.

“...into the project we have running in the basement.

“My dear Speer,” shouts Goebbels, “we are in private. We can call your War Computer by its name.”

Speer looks around nervously.

“The project is sensitive,” says Speer. “Could you please...”

“The War Computer!” shouts Goebbels, opening and slamming a nearby cupboard in rhythm with the words. “The War Computer! The War Computer!” Slam. Slam.

Speer looks around in a panic.

Goebbels begins lunging around the room and shouting, “The War Computer! The War Computer!”

“Please! We must be quiet!” says Speer.

“Speer. Let us review the evidence so far.” Goebbels reaches into his desk drawer and retrieves a large stack of papers. “These are the predictions of your war computer so far, are they not?”

“Herr Goebbels,” Speer begins, advancing around the desk to examine the papers. “Yes, these are the results, but we are still calibrating the—”

“The third of January,” Goebbels says, running his finger down a column of numbers. “The War Computer suggested sending a Panzer group into Orsha without support.” Goebbels stops and looks at Speer. “Do you recall the outcome of this battle?”

“We are early in the design stages,” says Speer.

“No!” shouts Goebbels. “One hundred and twenty German soldiers, dead. The town lost to the Russians by fifteen hundred hours.”

“And there are more. The nineteenth of January: six hundred men lost”

Goebbels begins dropping papers to the floor one-by-one.

“February, ambushed!”

Drop.

“March, surrounded and massacred!”

Drop.

“We are calibrating,” says Speer.

“You should have just switched off your War Computer and asked the maid whether she might like to attack this way,

or that. All the data I have here suggests your War Computer is worthless. A mess. A disgrace to the German people and an embarrassment to the Reich.”

Speer stares hard out of the window.

“Speer, I should inform you that the Führer has expressed to me his own reservations. He suggested you return to the design of buildings. Warfare is no place for you. You are, after all, Speer, a sketch artist.”

“As you were once a *writer*,” says Speer.

Goebbels stamps his foot loudly.

A fury rises up to his throat.

“We respect your contribution to architecture very much, Speer. It is an honor to know you. But as you can see,” says Goebbels, kicking the pile of papers on the floor, “Warfare is rather more complex than piling up bricks.”

Goebbels sits down in his chair and rocks gently, leafing through the papers on his desk, avoiding Speer’s gaze. After a moment Goebbels feigns surprise that Speer is still stood there.

“Speer, I suggest very strongly that you help the inventor and restore his Mechanical Man. It is a machine with logic far in advance of your War Computer.”

Goebbels stands and runs his fingertips across the map of Europe pinned to the wall.

“We are planning an advance in two days and The Führer has very kindly offered you nine hundred men as laboratory rats. We intend to take a village between Lake Seliger and

Rzhev. Here are the maps and intelligence on the region, topography and so forth. La di da,” Goebbels hands Speer a folder without looking up.

“This is the final chance for your War Computer, Speer. Hitler’s patience is wearing thin. Though he keeps it from you.”

Goebbels begins studying a radio transcript on his desk. He takes a pen and begins scoring heavy lines through paragraphs that undermine the German spirit.

“Find out how the Mechanical Man works and plug it into the War Computer,” says Goebbels. “If it can play chess, it can play war.”

After a moment, and much to his irritation, Goebbels realizes that Speer has still not yet left the room.

Goebbels’ pen stops half-way through scoring out a particularly subversive passage in which mental illness is mentioned without the required level of disgust. Goebbels stares hard at the page, refusing Speer any attention.

“But Herr Goebbels, the machine is extremely intricate,” Speer says. “The complexity of the design is such that even our best engineers struggle to understand the inventor’s description of its workings. To adapt its mechanisms so that we might use them to assist in the running of the War Computer. Well, it could be done in a year perhaps—if we were to double the staff—but to do it in time for the advance on Rzhev in two days. This is simply impossible.”

Goebbels struggles to concentrate on the paragraph he is editing. His foot stamps on the floor and he pushes everything on his desk to the ground with a crash.

“Speer, do you know what it takes to run a country? Have you any idea what demands are placed on Hitler and I in maintaining and building on the empire's great works?”

“Herr Goebbels, I— ”

“Do not say another word, Speer. Everything is what you make of it, even your self. Let me try and make this war situation clear to you.”

Goebbels strides over to the map on the wall. “Here is Rzhev. The town we want. You see it?”

Goebbels digs his fingernails into the huge map and rips Rzhev out of it. In his fury, his legs tangle in the draping remains of the map and he curses and stumbles, ripping the lower-half of the map to pieces about him. Then he crosses the room and presses the torn paper scraps of Rzhev into Speer's hand.

“You see now? Feel it. Hold it there. Feel it? Give it to me. Bring me Rzhev. If you cannot, I suggest that you resign immediately.

“And Speer: A man deposed of his military duty in such an unfitting manner may be forced to regain it in a far muddier and darker place than Berlin. In fact, I was pondering just now what a wonderful example it might set to the people if the famous Albert Speer was sent to the front lines to demonstrate

his architectural skills? Yes? I think the people might warm to an act of patriotism such as that. Trench design, what do you think of that, Speer?”

“Herr Goebbels?” says Speer.

“Trench design. You know: digging little ditches in the mud. Dig. Dig. Dig. With your little spade. Like a baby; with a little spade. You have forty-eight hours to bring me some results from your War Machine, Speer.”

Goebbels picks up some scraps of torn European map from the floor and take a wild bite from one of them.

“Mmmm... Can you taste the victory?” says Goebbels. He offers some of the map of Europe to Speer. “Oh? Not hungry?”

“No, I’m ok. Thank you.”

Goebbels spits out the damp pieces of map.

“Please consider the value you place on your life,” says Goebbels. “I find men work so much harder when there is so much at stake. Take me for example, Speer. There is much at stake for me here and I do work so very, very hard.”

Tears well in Speer’s eyes.

“Remember Speer, I love you,” says Goebbels, kissing Speer’s forehead repeatedly. And I adore your Welthauptstadt Germania. It is the architectural vision of a genius. And this is why I push you so hard. Now, you must be a good boy. Can you be a good boy for daddy? Yes? Or it will be the belt.”

Goebbels begins to undo his belt.

“Please, Herr Goebbels, we must maintain some decorum.”

Goebbels slaps Speer hard across the face, straightens Speer's jacket and wipes the tears away from the architect's cheeks.

“No, you're right. Not the belt this time, then,” says Goebbels. “But be a good boy, Albert. Then history will remember our work.”

“And if it does not?” asks Speer.

“If some day we are compelled to leave the scene of history,” says Goebbels. “We will slam the door so hard that the universe will shake and mankind will stand back in stupefaction.”

•

The University building is grand and cold. Amelia and her father walk down a flight of steps, deep into the basement. They reach an iron door and Schwartz taps on it loudly. A small steel section slides back in the top of the door and a man in spectacles stares out at them.

“Yes?” he says.

“Project Caro,” says Schwartz.

“What?” says the spectacled man.

“The War Computer?” says Schwartz.

“Oh, yes,” says the man.

A large bolt slides back and the door swings open. The spectacled man ushers them inside. A short corridor opens out into a huge underground warehouse.

Amelia can see hundreds of men in laboratory coats, hunched over tables. The ceiling is strung with lights and there is the soft hum of an electrical generator in the depths of the room. Amelia’s eyes adjust to the dim light, and it is then that she realizes, peering closely at the rows and rows of men seated at tables, that they are playing chess.

“Ah! Franz, and young Fräulein, Amelia,” says Speer, springing out of the shadows. “Welcome to the War Computer.”

Amelia looks around her, the basement opens out as far as the eye can see—the view is extraordinary. A small underground city.

“Now, this will delight you I’m sure. This is the room where we record the reactions of players to various chess positions and feed them back into the War Computer.”

Speer leads them across to a row of large electrical machines packed full of vacuum tubes.

“Beautiful, isn’t she?” says Speer, running his hands along a shelf of electronics. “This is our collaboration with a little American company called IBM. Speer runs his fingers over the chrome IBM logo. They have already helped us with administration at the camps. Excellent engineering.

“What camps?” asks Amelia.

Speer emits a small giggle. “Exactly,” he says.

“What are you doing in here with this machine?” asks Franz.

“Why, we are playing chess, of course,” says Speer. “This machine is simulating chess games.”

“Why?” says Amelia.

“Because we are at war! And war and chess are... twins.”

“Twins?”

“Yes! Chess appears, at first glance, somewhat unlike war: There is no bloodshed, there are inflexible rules to follow, there

is little mess or destruction. But, behind the elegant arrangement of the squares and the carved pieces there is an enormous complexity of human emotion and, importantly, an insight into the strategy of decision making on the battlefield. Did you know for example, Amelia, that there are more possible outcomes to a chess game than there are atoms in the entire universe?”

Amelia shakes her head.

“Yes, it’s rather remarkable isn’t it? You could spend a billion lifetimes attempting to play every combination. And when we begin to look at chess like that, we discover that it is, in fact, not so unlike the battlefield after all. It can be as complex as a battle.”

Amelia says nothing.

“Of course it would be very expensive, and practically very difficult, to stage real battles in a laboratory, so we simulate the essence of the battle, the tactical essence of the battle. The conflict is played out on these boards against this computer.”

“How many battles has it predicted correctly?” asks Amelia.

Speer turns to examine one of the vacuum tubes. His long fingers explore the glass enclosure. He taps it once, lightly. It makes a sound like a tiny bell being struck. This echoes out into the basement. A few of the chess players turn around.

“We intend to improve the machine, Amelia. This is where your father comes in. His clockwork man is a very impressive piece of engineering and we are keen to use it to improve our simulations.”

Amelia's father examines the rows of computers. She watches him as he runs his hands along the cables connecting the valve computers to the rows of chess players, deep into their games.

“Magnetic induction?” Franz asks Speer.

“Yes, very good,” says Speer. “I was certain you would grasp this quickly. The chess pieces contain magnets which alter the field patterns in the boards. This allows the computer to understand the current position of the game, and store this information in its database.

“The machine currently stores over sixty thousand game possibilities—this is the number of games played so far. But it can only store the positions as quickly as these men can play

chess. Your clockwork man, however, could race through many thousands of games per-hour. At that rate we would have a year's worth of strategic data within a day. And, it seems, a day is all we have. Herr Goebbels insists."

"The Mechanical Man is badly damaged," says Amelia's father.

"You will repair him," says Speer.

Speer walks around to the other side of the row of computers and begins examining the connections.

"They are very fragile things, these computers. And they are very clever, of course," Speer says, looking at Amelia. "But they are so very vulnerable. These valves and wires; so sensitive. They are able to make calculations that would take you or I a lifetime to complete, but the slightest misplaced switch or coil —"

One of the vacuum tubes suddenly explodes, sending tiny fragments of glass across the room.

"Replacement please!" shouts Speer.

Speer feels a hand on his shoulder. It is Schwartz.

"Good afternoon, Herr Schwartz," says Speer.

Schwartz looks down at Amelia.

"Well, how long will it take?" Speer asks Amelia's father. "Can the machine be repaired overnight?"

"With the right tools, it can be done," says Franz.

"Very good. I will return tomorrow morning to examine the repairs and begin the simulations. Konrad is my top

engineer, and he is already in there with your Mechanical Man, examining the device. And Franz: Work fast. One seldom recognizes the devil when he is putting his hand on your shoulder. But you can be certain he has his hand on yours.”

•

Franz steps slowly into the university workshop. The Mechanical Man sits in the centre of the room, its head dropped cruelly downwards, like a broken doll.

Amelia runs over to the machine and tries to reattach the bolts that fasten the metal head to the torso, but it is no use, the head flops forwards again. Franz watches Amelia's struggle for a moment, then notices a tall man with spectacles lurking in the shadows at the back of the laboratory. Catching Franz's eye, the man steps quickly forwards, like a stick-insect, and jabs out his hand.

"Konrad Konrad, pleased to meet you," says the man. "I am Herr Speer's chief engineer. I am from Hamburg. It is quite an impressive piece of work you have here. I've done what I can to salvage broken parts from the ballroom. As you can see, the bomb damage was quite significant. The machine has suffered a minor decapitation. I have also discovered damage to the gyroscope here, and I have been having trouble accessing the deeper parts of the mechanism. I have attempted to remove the

outer parts so that we can check the functioning of the core of the machine.”

Franz is bewildered to see how much of the machine has been dismantled. He sees that Konrad has taken apart the rear section of the Mechanical Man. Cogs and pulleys lie across the floor. Konrad crouches among them and begins to work.

“If I can just remove this panel—” says Konrad, his long arms probing inside the machine.

To Franz’s horror, Konrad reaches for a screwdriver and begins to pry at the panel concealing the secret space in which Amelia hides.

“Herr Konrad,” says Franz, stepping forwards and lightly resting his hand on Konrad’s wrist, drawing the screwdriver away from the machine. “With the greatest of respect, I must insist that no further dismantling of the machine occurs yet. I need time to assess the damage. Many of the components in the machine are extremely sensitive, and exposure to the air could damage the operation of the device.”

Rein smiles and tilts his head to look at Franz. “What have you got in here, Franz?” asks Konrad, tapping on the secret door. “Some kind of magic?”

“It contains magic of a kind,” says Franz. “Let me demonstrate.”

There is a large blackboard at the end of the room. Franz walks across to it and picks up a piece of chalk. His hand shakes slightly as he begins to scrawl a diagram on the board.

“In the core of the Mechanical Man is a vacuum-sealed computing mechanism containing a triad of valves to predict the next move. This is the brain of the machine.

“The brain receives information from the chessboard via electromagnetic induction. The computer knows where the pieces are on the board and can make moves based on the current gameplay. The equipment in the core is extremely sensitive and opening the device would compromise its operation to the extent that it might take months to repair the resulting damage. Fortunately, there is a way to check the integrity and functioning of the core without exposing it to the air. The device has a system-check function.”

Franz walks over to the Mechanical Man and presses a small button on the back of the Mechanical Man's neck. In response, a small pilot light flickers on in the centre of the chessboard.

“Here,” says Franz, “Look! The light is illuminated—the core functions are intact—there is no need to open the vacuum-sealed core. We need only to repair the outer mechanism and the movement of the man himself.”

Konrad considers this for a minute. Then proceeds in his attempt to wrench open the secret panel.

“Herr Konrad,” says Franz, “the machine will be ruined if you damage the core.”

“Yes, very interesting Franz,” says Konrad, jamming his screwdriver into the small gap between the secret panel and the

frame. “But we have the world’s greatest engineers here and it will be perfectly possible to rebuild a vacuum sealed chamber with the enormous resources of the Reich. Your engineering secrets will be safe with us.”

Franz can hear the door creaking under the strain of the wrenching screwdriver.

Amelia rushes forwards and grabs Konrad’s arm. He shrugs her off. “Fräulein!”

He throws Amelia across the room. She tumbles to a stop under a workbench. Konrad shouts at Franz.

“Keep this girl under control.”

Franz walks towards Konrad, staring in a fury. Konrad stops wrenching the door and stands up holding the screwdriver out like a knife, legs bent, ready.

“Halt!” shouts a voice.

Konrad drops the screwdriver and salutes. “Heil Hitler.”

Schwartz stands in the doorway of the laboratory, holding a tray of sandwiches and looking on in horror at the scene before him.

“What is this?” snaps Schwartz, putting the sandwich tray on a workbench and marching over to where Amelia is slumped on the floor.

He lifts her up and inspects her hands, turning them this way and that. “Are they ok?” he asks her.

“I think so,” says Amelia.

“These hands,” says Schwartz sternly, holding up Amelia’s

hands. “Are essential to the maintenance of the machine.”

“Yes Herr Schwartz,” says Konrad.

“Well, why then,” continues Schwartz, “are they being treated with such disrespect and carelessness?”

Konrad begins to mutter something, but Schwartz cuts him off. “Do you have any idea, Herr Konrad, how important it is to me, personally, that this project goes to plan? Do you think I enjoy it out in that forsaken wretch of Eastern Europe? Are you trying to ruin me Konrad? This girl's hands are as essential to the running of the machine as a clockmaker's fingers are to the maintenance of a clock.” Schwartz points to Konrad's tools. “Do you throw your drills and soldering irons across the room?” Schwartz grabs a nearby soldering iron and throws it across the room. “Have I now improved your soldering iron? Or have I sabotaged your work?”

“That was an expensive piece of equipment, Herr Schwartz, I—“

“Why then do you throw this girl?” interrupts Schwartz.

“I apologize Herr Schwartz, I only—“

Schwartz holds up Amelia's hands.

“These are expensive tools.”

Schwartz drops Amelia's hands and they fall to her sides.

“I think I shall sit here and eat sandwiches while the work progresses, it will be good for you to have some supervision” says Schwartz. “Continue!”

Schwartz offers Amelia a sandwich, and she sits with him to

eat. Franz begins to examine the damage done to the machine.

A thought then glimmers in Franz's head, a ridiculous, fanciful and yet deeply alluring thought.

Franz wonders if he might be able to make the Mechanical Man function properly: that he might, given the resources now available to him, be able to improve the original plan for the mechanism and allow the machine to function independently. To play chess without Amelia hidden inside it.

In his workshop in Prague, Franz was fiercely limited by the shortage of materials and components. But, here in Berlin he has all the resources of the University laboratory.

Looking about himself, Franz can see endless shelves of wiring, valves and switches. It might be possible to build the machine as originally planned, using reliable components and with the help of the engineer Rein. They could work from his original designs and rebuild the device as true Mechanical Man, a man that can play chess himself.

The idea grows hot in his skull. He believes it might be possible. It might be possible. It might be possible.

Franz sets to work. He picks valves from boxes, arranging components, cleaning cogs. He describes wiring systems to Rein. Other engineers are called into the workshop. They take instructions from Franz and vanish into deep corners of the basement, soldering and drilling, creating parts to Franz's design.

He works throughout the night, attaching new parts and

gears to the Mechanical Man.

As the morning sun rises, Franz breaks from welding for a minute and sees that Schwartz's head is slumped forwards, a half-eaten sandwich resting on his chest, snoring loudly. Underneath the workbench, is Amelia, sleeping soundly too, her tiny arms folded beneath her head.

•

Amelia wakes up. The workshop is empty. She hears Schwartz's snoring above her. In the distance, outside the laboratory, she can hear her father and Konrad discussing the Mechanical Man's design. She stands up and rubs her eyes. An unfamiliar silhouette stands in the middle of the room where the Mechanical Man once was.

As her eyes grow accustomed to the dim light, the silhouette becomes clearer: it is the Mechanical Man, but he is changed. Dense bundles of wire stream out of his sides, like thick, corrugated wings that fold back into the box he sits on. His head is no longer wood but polished aluminum, with eyes that glint with two glass valves. A new section has been welded

onto the side of the man: A box that hums with electricity and, in the centre of it, a large power switch. Amelia reaches forward and flicks it down.

The Mechanical Man's eyes light up, two hot valves glow in the sockets, and he raises his head with a pneumatic hiss. Amelia sits opposite him. The chessboard is already set up, so Amelia makes a move: She moves a pawn two spaces forwards.

The Mechanical Man lifts his arm.

“You're alive,” says Amelia.

Amelia stares in amazement. He reaches forwards and picks up a pawn, grips it for a moment, then drops it on the floor. Amelia goes to pick it up, but as she is doing so, the Mechanical Man picks up a castle and raises it into the air, then jerking wildly, throws it up against the ceiling.

With a terrible hiss, he convulses and one of his eyes blows out, the valve shattering in the socket. Amelia hears Konrad's voice loudly in the corridor outside. The Mechanical Man raises his arm one last time and slowly brings it to rest on the board. Amelia quickly rearranges the board, but in her haste she knocks a castle off the table, which skitters across the floor towards Schwartz, who murmurs and shifts in his sleep.

She creeps across the floor, tiptoeing towards the sleeping general, and picks up the castle. Schwartz lets out an almighty snore and slumps down on the workbench. Amelia places the castle back on the board.

She flicks the switch on the side of the mechanical man to

the 'Off' position and places his hand back in his lap. She looks into his one remaining eye, for a moment she thinks she sees something flicker there. She looks closer and closer. The door to the laboratory swings slowly open, throwing a bright light across the room. She hears her father's voice.

"...and so we should be able to attenuate the current by splitting the signal across two..." Seizing her chance, Amelia darts around to the back of the machine, opens the secret panel, and crawls inside. Despite the alterations to the outside of the machine, her secret space remains as it was. She peeks through the spy-hole in the side of the box and waits.

"Bring the machine through and plug it into the grid," Amelia hears Konrad's voice say.

"Herr Schwartz!"

Amelia can see Rein shaking Schwartz awake. "Where is the girl?"

Schwartz rubs his face with his hands and adjusts his uniform.

"If she has any sense," says Schwartz, "she is in the canteen. Which is where I must be too."

"Breakfast will wait. We have one hour before the simulations must be run. Would you assist Franz and I in transporting the Mechanical Man to the strategy room? The girl can be found later."

Amelia braces herself in the small space and feels the Mechanical Man leave the ground. She imagines she is on a

small boat, floating down a stream. Peering through the spy-hole she sees the endless rows of chess players, stretching out in the basement as far as the eye can see.

Her boat glides among them.

There is then a thump, and the Mechanical Man is placed back down on the floor. She hears the drag of thick cables across the floor, and a number of gentle clicks as they are attached to the Mechanical Man's body. Sensing a shadow through the opaque chess-board above her, Amelia looks up to see Rein's face staring up at the Mechanical Man's eyes.

"Franz," he says, "we need a replacement valve."

Konrad turns for a moment, then returns with a valve. He carefully unscrews the blown bulb and replaces it with the fresh component.

"We'll run the simulation in computation-mode only," says Konrad. "Turn off all the mechanical functioning. We just need his brain operational. His body can stay sleeping."

Amelia hears switches and gears being adjusted outside the box. She watches as a small set of gears above her disengage from each other—moving apart so that their teeth no longer touch.

"He's dreaming of war?" asks Schwartz, peering into The Mechanical Man's eyes

"The Mechanical Man is indeed now

like a dreamer in sleep, says Konrad. "The machine's body will stay limp and lifeless, while his electric brain runs many

thousands of battle games at high-speed. These games will be fed down these cables and into the War Computer.” Konrad shouts across the laboratory, “Input the first set of simulation data! First battle plan: Six-hundred men, approaching from the east. Supply the topography and known intelligence reports. Now run the first model.

From inside the Mechanical Man, Amelia hears a switch on the side of the Mechanical Man click into place and a loud humming noise erupts around her. The small space she is crouched inside lights up with a strange energy. Wires and bulbs illuminate themselves in a large grid pattern across the chess board. The board is now illuminated in 100 by 100 squares. Lights flicker rapidly across its surface.

Outside the machine, Schwartz’s eyes widen and he drops his donut.

“That’s pretty! Pretty lights!” says Schwartz.

“Those lights symbolize a giant game of chess.” says Konrad. “Armies of thousands advancing on each other in simulation.” The lights dance and collide in a glittering fury. “Each light represents a Nazi soldier attacking, says Konrad. “Or an enemy advancing or retreating.

“A terrible star-field,” says Schwartz” Where the heavens aggress against each other; fierce and determined.”

The lights collide with ever increasing velocity until only a few remain, circling each other in the middle of the board.

Inside The Mechanical Man, Amelia puts her hands over

her ears. The lights spin faster and faster until they become a blur, a perfect circle, etched out on the middle of the board. Then, suddenly, one light darts out, the others follow, and with an almighty explosion, they collide in the corner of the board. A flame bursts out, and Amelia cowers. A second later, a muffled shout comes from outside the box and then a thick foamy liquid covers the board, obscuring her view.”

“We’ve blown the power coupling,” says Konrad, somewhere outside the box.

“At least eight hours to repair,” says her father’s voice.

“Do we have a complete data set?” shouts Konrad.

Far off in the laboratory a voice shouts back, “Yes, Herr Konrad, we recorded data from a complete war simulation before the coupling shutdown.”

Amelia hears a scattered applause outside the Mechanical Man.

“Congratulations, Franz,” says Konrad. “We have results. I’ll have the mathematicians examine this data immediately and we will present our findings to Goebbels in exactly one hour.”

Konrad raises his voice, and says to a solider, “Take the Mechanical Man back to the workshop and equip Franz with everything he requires to repair the power supply.”

“Congratulations,” says Konrad. “A full data set. Now we have to hope that your Mechanical Man’s predictions are accurate on the battlefield.”

Amelia feels the Mechanical Man lifted up from the floor, carried through the strategy room, and placed back in the workshop. She peers out through the spy-hole. The door to the workshop is ajar and she is uncertain whether it is safe to climb out of her hiding space.

She reaches for the door-latch. But then she hears the workshop door slam shut and two voices talking in the room outside. She recognizes them, it is Konrad, and Goebbels. She peers back through the spy-hole. The two men are alone in the workshop, and speak in hushed voices.

“And his daughter?”

“Inquisitive, but so young. We have little to worry about there. There is plenty to keep her busy.”

“She might be useful to us, as an incentive.”

“Yes... yes, she might.”

“Herr Goebbels, I must ask that more tests are run.”

“You can run all the tests you like, Konrad. But you will run the tests next week. There are many people who would like to see the Mechanical Man in action in Berlin.”

“Herr Goebbels, this is a machine of great scientific importance, and Franz has barely revealed the most superficial of its secrets, it is only right that it is turned over to science. It is a military weapon of huge significance, not a parlor game.”

Amelia watches Goebbels lean close towards Konrad's face and whisper.

“Roth, high-society may seem very unimportant to you,

here in your fortress of science, but money is the very foundation of war and we must impress our donors. What you consider a parlor game in the Sportpalast will inspire and delight our funders at Chase Manhattan Bank. Indeed, Herr J.D. Rockefeller himself will be in attendance at the chess game. He has already raised twenty million dollars for our war. Twenty million!”

Goebbels grabs Konrad’s head and holds it steady in front of his own; inches from his face.

“Henry Ford is also visiting for the match,” whispers Goebbels furiously. “Ford supplies one-third of our militarized trucks. Is he also a parlor game to you, Konrad? Is Henry Ford nothing? Why is it that you scientists are so narrow-minded? Perhaps you would like to join your colleagues in field studies instead? I know of an excellent camp in Poland that is in need of more scientists.”

“No, of course not, Herr Goebbels.”

“The match in the Sportpalast,” says Goebbels. “It will be a night to remember.”

Goebbels releases his grip on Konrad’s head.

“You still intend to play the Mechanical Man?” asks Konrad.

“Why?” says Goebbels. “Does this surprise you?”

“Well, I do wonder if... Would it be wise, Herr Goebbels, for the German people to witness a machine built by a Czech inventor beat their beloved Minister?”

“Beat me?” bellows Goebbels. “Beat me?”

He emits a long, hollow laugh.

“Konrad, it is a machine. A clever machine. But it is inferior as a player. I have watched it play. It is sloppy, it plays like an Eastern European. It lacks the elegance of a Nazi.”

Konrad looks at Goebbels for a long time. Then he shifts his gaze over to the Mechanical Man, as if staring Amelia right in the eye.

“Yes, Herr Goebbels. Of course.”

“And Konrad,” says Goebbels, “I have tricks of my own. Let me tell you something important: Far in the distance roars the sea, and I lay down there and think for a long time about the pale man.”

“Poetry, Herr Goebbels?”

“What?”

“You just—“

“That is all. Good day to you, Konrad.”

Goebbels opens the door and Konrad shuffles out into the corridor.

Amelia presses her eye to the spy hole. Goebbels closes the door to the room and walks across to the Mechanical Man. Goebbels disappears out of her line of sight, but Amelia can hear his footsteps walking around the machine. She hears faint tapping noises, Goebbels’ fingernail running around the box. She looks up through the chessboard top, into the dim light.

A finger appears on the glass. Tap. Tap. Tap. Goebbels’ face

appears, looming over her, his lips pulled back and eyes wide with curiosity. He begins to arrange the chess pieces on the board. Amelia shifts back into the darkest corner of the hiding place, pushing herself tightly into a ball. She hears the creak of Goebbels sitting down in the chair opposite the Mechanical Man.

He moves a pawn forwards two squares. Amelia stares transfixed at the board above. She is certain that if she moves an inch Goebbels will hear her shuffle in the secret compartment and discover the fraud. She listens carefully. There is no sound.

"Play me," shouts Goebbels suddenly. "Play me, Mechanical Man."

Amelia dare not move.

Goebbels slams his fist on the board. "Play!"

Again there is silence. Then she sees a shadow creep over the board again, it is Goebbels, staring into the face of the mechanical man above her.

"What are you?" Goebbels asks the Mechanical Man. "You are a machine, and no match for the Reich. You are empty clockwork, a vacant collection of cogs and valves. Disgusting. You can't even move without being wound up. What kind of a thing are you? You can't walk properly, you can't feel, you can't love. Disgusting."

Goebbels picks up his king and knocks over the Mechanical man's queen, placing his piece in the now vacant square.

The Mechanical Man is still.

Goebbels stands and walks across the room. Amelia peers through the spy-hole. She sees Goebbels take a long bow, then raising his arms up to an imaginary crowd, he says, “Thank you, thank you! Yes, an exceptionally close match, and the machine is of course a brilliant player, a powerful computer, but no match for the strong will of our lands.” Goebbels pauses, considering his speech. “No, that’s not right.”

He paces for a moment, stops and taps his foot lightly on the ground. “The Nazi glory will and.... No, no... The German purity of... Man only honors what he conquers or defends...” For a moment Goebbels is lost in thought. Amelia watches him mumble something quickly to himself, then he begins again.

“An extraordinary match. A demonstration of the power and reach of... technology will assure our victory over Europe.”

Looking around at the room and nodding, he takes another bow, this one longer than the first, and while he is bowed over, the door to the workshop swings open and Herr Schwartz walks in.

“Oh, Herr Goebbels, I... Heil Hitler,” stammers Schwartz.

Goebbels snaps his body quickly upright and inspects the ceiling for a moment. Finding nothing of interest there, he looks down at Schwartz.

“Yes, Schwartz?” says Goebbels.

“A call from the radio station. They want to know your

decision on today's broadcast.”

“Certainly,” says Goebbels and strides past Schwartz.

Amelia watches as Schwartz pokes about in the tray of half-eaten sandwiches. Finding one he likes he pops it into his mouth, he puts two others in his coat pocket, and leaves the workshop.

The room falls perfectly quiet, and so Amelia unlocks the secret door and climbs out. Just as she is about to shut the door, a voice calls out.

“Amelia!”

It is her father. She clicks the door shut.

“Amelia, you were inside the machine?”

She nods.

“Amelia! I haven't checked it is still safe. Parts of the mechanism are now electrically driven.”

“I know,” says Amelia. “I played a game against the Mechanical Man. I switched him on, before you took him out to the strategy room, and I played a game.”

“The blown valve,” says her father. “That was you?”

“He can't play,” says Amelia. “He can't make a single move.”

“There is work still to be done. But he can play. He will be able to play by the match on Friday.”

Amelia sees the uncertainty in her father's eyes. He knows as well as she does that the Mechanical Man does not work—will never work. He places his hand on the top of her head.

“Amelia. Trust me. The machine will work. I have access to all these tools.”

Franz walks over to a workbench and holds up a box of valves. “We have components and expertise that I never had in Prague.”

“Should I hide inside it?” asks Amelia.

“No,” says her father. “There will be no match this evening. After I am finished my repairs, you won’t need to hide inside the machine at the Sportpalast. It will play its own game.”

“Franz,” bellows Schwartz, striding in through the workshop door. “We are moving the machine. Secure the mechanism.”

•

Goebbels stands in the grand hallway of the *National Galerie*, looking at a Picasso. The twisted face disgusts him. Otto Kotz, art editor of the newspaper stands next to Goebbels, treating him to a criticism of every work on display.

“I only wish,” says Kotz, “that the artists were strung up next to their paintings so that all Berlin might spit in their faces.”

“Perhaps it can be arranged,” says Goebbels.

“A most disgraceful piece we all agree,” Kotz continues, walking across the gallery to another painting. “But it is almost forgivable in comparison to Kandinsky. Look what a

perplexingly awful creation this is. The offensiveness of these odd circles in a black abyss. I can't imagine a painting that holds less value for the German people than this act of childishness.”

“I rather like the colors,” says Lyla.

Goebbels looks at her and Kotz stops speaking for a second.

“Well, Fraülein, of course!” says Kotz. “And this is proof of the artist's malice. He lures us into an affection for his work but, beneath its seductive cloak, it is a terrible and despicable thing. Look at the intersection of this circle here, and the general meaninglessness of the work. How could this inspire any moral of value in our beloved people? No, it is unacceptable.”

“I know so little about art,” says Lyla.

“If you knew about art it would help you very little, for this is not *art*, my dear. But you are yourself art. That much is clear. And who should ask one piece of art to critique another. It would be impossible.”

“Move on quickly,” says Goebbels. “These degenerate atrocities bore me. I feel like I am vomiting into my own skull.”

“Herr Goebbels himself picked this art,” says Kotz.

“But I thought — ” begins Lyla.

“Oh no,” says Kotz. “He did not pick these pictures for their merit. He picked them so that the German people might see and recognize these disgraceful and degenerate works.

These works are produced by artists who are enemies of the people, and enemies of the Reich. Herr Goebbels is a wise and honorable man.”

“Why do we not hide these paintings in the basement? Or burn them?” asks Lyla.

“Oh, I burned as much as I could,” says Goebbels.

“Because Herr Goebbels is a sensitive and caring man. He does not crudely censor every artist. A few he drags out into the light, so that all of Berlin might walk past this Munch, or that Kokoschka and learn for themselves exactly what disgusting, tasteless muck looks like.”

“It is an enlightening experience for the people,” says Goebbels.

“And the most popular exhibit in Berlin,” says Kotz.

“I despise it all myself more deeply than any visitor would,” says Goebbels. “The Reich entrusts me to measure the vileness of every work and to sift through them and pick out the very worst for exhibition. It was a depressing task.”

“Yet, the people of Berlin thank you for your struggles, Herr Goebbels,” says Kotz.

Goebbels suddenly finds himself nauseous and unable to look at the walls. He fixes his eyes on the small patterned tiles of the gallery floor and walks quickly down the hallway.

His bad foot feels lumpen, heavy and tiresome. He senses Lyla by his side. She watches him walk up the staircase. He can stand it no more, and, gripping the handrail, turns and glares at

her.

“Joseph,” she says softly, “are you well?”

He says nothing and turns back to the staircase, hauling himself up to the second floor.

He wishes he were back in the calm of his study.

“Quite a hike!” says Kotz, with a jolly wave, passing Goebbels on the staircase. “A grand building indeed. But with glory must come exertion.”

Goebbels reaches the top of the staircase and hobbles down the corridor towards the central exhibition room. He can hear the light taps of Lyla’s shoes behind him and the clump of Kotz’s boots far ahead.

The chatter of a hundred guests gets louder and louder, like a wave breaking, and he soon finds himself among them, in the midst of the wave. Now he is shaking hands and exchanging pleasantries with the fKonrad.

Goebbels forces himself through the foam and he stands in the middle of the party. Lyla grips his hand sharply. He turns towards her and she flits her eyes across the party, calling his attention to something. Goebbels follows her gaze and, to his dismay, recognizes a familiar woman bustling her way through the dresses and canapés towards them. It is his wife, Magda, and two children.

“Joseph! How wonderful,” Magda says loudly.

Many of the guests close to them turn around in curiosity.

“And Herr Kotz!” says Magda. “What a delight. And you!”

she says, turning to Lyla, “You must be the actress I’ve heard so much about.”

“Well, I suppose I must be,” says Lyla, smiling broadly.

Magda keeps her eyes on Lyla, apparently expecting more from the girl. She says nothing and Goebbels feels words rise up through his throat and topple from his mouth.

“The children!” Goebbels says, crouching down and embracing them. “Marvelous. I thought you were all going to stay at home this evening, but it really is spectacular that you could be here. Helmut, weren’t you sick? Your mother and I thought you had quite a temperature.” Goebbels puts his hand to the boy’s forehead.

“I was quite bored at home,” says Magda, addressing all of them, and anyone close enough to hear. “So I thought to myself: Why don’t I come and see my husband at work? I do wonder what he gets up to sometimes, and with *whom*. Joseph can be rather secretive, but then I suppose the Reich’s secrets must be protected. I suppose so many secrets must be protected.”

She laughs. Kotz offers a small grunt.

“He is a rather imaginative and grand man, my husband, don’t you think?” continues Magda. “Look at this party. Quite wonderful. I am utterly in awe. I rarely get to see his *work*.”

Magda notices a waiter passing with a tray of champagne. She elegantly sidesteps to intercept him, taking two flutes and quickly drinking the first.

“Quite a party,” she says. “Quite a party. And the artwork downstairs, really wonderful. And by wonderful I mean *disgusting*, of course. The worst stuff is not for exhibition, you know? Some art is merely vile, and the Reich is happy to sell that to the Americans. But the truly degenerate art...” she pulls a cigarette from a delicate silver case and lights it. “Well, that stuff, Joseph simply has it burnt. *Woosh!* Up in flames, just like that. All gone. It’s the best way to deal with it.”

Magda exhales an enormous cloud of smoke across the party. It floats over the guests and towards an open window, like some ghost.

“Lyla must know, of course,” Magda goes on. “Her industry has its problems. Of course we cannot burn the playwrights and poets, and nor can we burn the actors, although sometimes I should like to.” Magda laughs. “But we educate them in the best way we know how. And an education is the most valuable thing we can give a person. We never stop learning. What’s the most important thing you have learned tonight, Lyla?”

“Perhaps it is time for the children to go to bed?” says Goebbels.

“My husband is an infinitely considerate man,” says Magda. “He cares very much for our children. I sometimes wonder if his interest in me was solely for the production of them. Perhaps I am no longer morally pure, and he might like to have me hung in the gallery of atrocities downstairs. How might I

look Lyla?”

Magda laughs and pirouettes. She strikes a pose as if ready to be painted. Then she flings her head back and smiles.

“Am I acceptable art, or do I corrupt the German morale?” she asks, still looking at Lyla who takes a small step back and turns to Kotz.

“You are, as always, lovely Magda” says Kotz, taking Magda’s hand. “A true icon of the Reich.”

“Yes, yes, lead me away Herr Kotz. Away from this,” Magda looks directly into Lyla’s eyes, “degenerate art.”

Magda drinks her remaining champagne flute and curtsseys deeply at the group.

“I’m afraid I must leave,” she says. “The children are quite ill this evening and I must look after them. They are so often ill that it is almost *peculiar*, isn’t it Joseph? But I’m afraid that this is again the case, and I must go. Goodnight everyone.”

Magda beckons to the two children and they follow her. She picks her way through the crowded party, vanishing in a sea of cocktail dresses and tobacco smoke.

“Those children are repeatedly unwell,” says Goebbels. “I have always thought that a mother who is not everything for her children: a friend, a teacher, a confidant, a source of joy and founded pride, inducement and soothing, judge and forgiver, that mother obviously chose the wrong job.”

“And I suppose the pay for such a job must be excellent?” says Lyla.

“Kotz, there is something I would like you to see,” says Goebbels. “Not a work of art precisely, but a meeting of the arts and sciences. You will write about it in tomorrow’s newspaper. I am am certain of it.”

Goebbels leads the group across the gallery. Hands reach up in salute to Goebbels as he passes. He feels, much to his distaste, like a child walking through an enchanted forest, tree limbs darting out at him as he passes. Aware of his shoulders tightening, he pulls them back and crafts a vacant smile.

They reach the end of the gallery, where, behind a velvet rope, sits the Mechanical Man. The machine is polished, glinting under the light of the chandeliers like a treasure. From behind it emerges Amelia’s father, wearing a tool-belt and holding a dirty cloth.

“Franz,” says Goebbels, “I would like you to meet Herr Kotz, from the newspaper and you have already met Lyla Vogel.”

“Good evening,” says Franz, “I apologize, my hands are dirty from the machine. Pleased to meet you Herr Kotz and good evening, Lyla.”

Lyla curtseys and Goebbels notices that she is looking at Franz in a quite peculiar manner. She is, he decides, disgusted at the sight of Franz’s appearance. Nevertheless, he feels a discomfort build. Unable to put a name to the thing, he turns to Kotz and ushers him behind the velvet rope to inspect the Mechanical Man.

“This work was created under the rule of the Reich,” says Goebbels.

“It is wonderful!” Lyla says, crouching down to inspect the machinery. “And to think it was produced under Nazi rule. The art and machines of our age will be our finest, don't you think, Herr Kotz?”

Kotz walks around the machine, tapping the elegant metalwork and stroking the newer, electrical components of the Mechanical Man.

“It is an interesting piece,” says Kotz. “How is its chess?”

“It plays chess very well indeed, Herr Kotz,” says Lyla. “I saw it the other night at the Ballhaus. It opened with the French Defense and was certain to have won the match were it not for the air raid.”

“The evening ended unpleasantly,” says Goebbels. “These incessant bombing runs. Infuriating. We shall have dominance within the month. Anyway, enough of war. It has no place here in the gallery.”

“Of course, Joseph,” says Kotz. “All of Berlin is talking about your chess match with the machine. They say the machine is extraordinary, with the mind of twenty grandmasters at its disposal. They look forward to Herr Goebbels attempting to beat it.”

Goebbels feels his foot clench. “*Attempt?*” he says, “*Attempting* to beat it?”

Kotz looks at Lyla, then back at Goebbels. “Herr Goebbels,

I only mean to..."

Goebbels turns his back on Kotz, he feels a rage rise through his body, a noiseless scream. He looks out across the party and slowly the rage evaporates. He turns back to Kotz and smiles.

"Of course, Herr Kotz, we must encourage the drama of the situation," says Goebbels. "How much more exciting for the crowd at the Sportpalast if they believe the machine has a chance of winning? Wonderful drama. Of course I will tease them. I will allow the people to see the power of the machine. I will kill my prey slowly, so that the people might witness the mechanical man's power, and in witnessing that power know that its adversary, in his victory, exceeds it."

There is suddenly a small applause from the far corner of the room and Goebbels stretches himself tall in an attempt to see what the commotion is. In the corner of the gallery he sees the giant chess-board, with pieces the same height as a human child.

This is an assessment of scale that is easy to make because at this very moment a child is, in fact, carrying a piece across the board. It is Amelia, the inventor's daughter.

Amelia moves a giant bishop across the board, using two arms to hug it. She struggles, places it down and takes a castle. There is another light applause. Goebbels sees that she is playing a game on the giant board against a guest. It is a man he recognizes as a minor civil servant. The man walks around, between the chess pieces, figuring out his next move.

“It seems there is a chess game afoot already in this very room,” says Kotz. “We must investigate.”

Kotz picks his way through the crowd and Goebbels feels Lyla’s hand in his, drawing him across the room, towards the giant chess board and the deafening chatter of the guests. Goebbels finds himself stood on the edge of the board watching the game with a dull reluctance; but soon with a peculiar fascination.

The girl, Amelia, is a clumsy player. Her opening is weak, but she seems to please the crowd. The civil servant is also a rather poor player and seems more interested in his whiskey glass than the board.

Amelia picks up her queen. It is a piece almost twice her height, and difficult to maneuverer. She moves it three squares across the board and drops it down.

The civil servant looks at the positions on the board. He appears rather desperate and confused, scratching his head and walking between the pieces. His king seems trapped. He pauses for a moment, then looks into the crowd for help, catching Goebbels’ eye.

“Herr Goebbels,” says the civil servant. “Can you suggest a move?”

Goebbels waves his hand dismissively and backs away into the crowd, but he feels the mood of the room turn against him. Lyla’s hand is still in his and he finds himself drawn back to the edge of the chess board, then stepping out onto it and

circling the pieces.

“This is quite a mess!” says Goebbels loudly. “It reminds me of the Russian Front.”

There is laughter.

“You’ve put yourself in a very weak position,” he tells Amelia. “This man’s forces surround yours.”

Goebbels walks across the board to where Amelia is standing, studying the board from behind a rook.

“What do you think this girl should do?” Goebbels asks the civil servant.

“I think she is rather stuck,” says the man.

“Rather stuck,” says Goebbels to the crowd. “Yes, she is. She is in an awkward position.”

Goebbels walks quickly over to the edge of the board, takes Lyla’s hand and pulls her out onto the chess board.

“I propose a change in this game,” says Goebbels. “Remove the pieces!”

Two SS men make their way through the crowd and begin moving the chess pieces off the board.

“Now bring me sixteen men from the guard.”

One of the SS men marches out of the room and down the corridor. Goebbels strides through the party. The guests are now quiet; fascinated.

“We need some volunteers,” says Goebbels. “First, four castles.”

Goebbels paces through the crowd, picking out guests,

naming each person as a chess piece, and ordering them to the board. Many of them react in delight, others shuffle with a wariness towards the chess set, stepping into their positions.

An old general becomes a castle. A lady in long evening gown becomes a bishop. A hush soon falls across the room and the crowd moves closer to the board to get a view of the strange human-chess game unfolding.

“Franz!” says Goebbels. “Where is he? Ah, here.”

Franz crosses the board and Goebbels moves him into place.

“You are the White King—stand here,” Goebbels says. “And Amelia, you are the White Queen.”

She walks into her square.

Goebbels takes Lyla’s hand and leads her across the board to take the position of the Black Queen, and Goebbels himself stands in the position of the Black King.

“I feel unwell, Joseph” says Lyla, leaning close to Goebbels ear. “I am still not settled from the other night.”

“The game,” whispers Goebbels, “will improve us all.”

Lyla smiles weakly. Goebbels feels an irritation in his leg, but it is quickly forgotten. At that moment sixteen SS officers march into the room and carefully arrange themselves in the position of the pawns on the board. Goebbels notices Lyla’s mood change. She seems alive again, surprised and thrilled by the arrival of the SS officers, who — Goebbels sees, with an undisguised pride — are impressive. Uniforms buttoned and brushed, boots polished, stood to attention.

There is an applause from the crowd.

“The armies are assembled,” says Goebbels, raising his arms and smiling at the crowd. “Lyla, you will issue orders to the Black Army. Young Amelia, you will issue orders to the White Army. Let the game begin.”

The players are uncertain of their positions for a moment. The woman in the long evening gown, who has taken the part of a white bishop, steps off the board, to collect a cigarette from her husband, infuriating Goebbels who snaps at her.

“Do not desert your position.”

He senses he has upset some of the guests with his curtness, so he adds, “Or I will have you shot,” causing a laughter to ripple. But it is a hollow laughter—he wonders if they are mocking him.

They are harmless as goats. Still, he cannot abide a lack of commitment and there is—as he finds increasingly common in public events—a tension in the air that both drives and confuses him. He supposes this is the nature of the times. The country is at war and signs of weakness are to be defended against in the state, and in himself.

He is lost in this thought when Lyla's voice cuts through, loud in his ear.

“Joseph, move to that square please,” she says.

He looks at her, then examines the board, realizing that this move opens a vulnerability.

“Lyla,” he says, “this is an unwise move, it opens up the—”

“Herr Goebbels, am I not your Queen?” Lyla asks playfully, turning to the crowd of guests. Goebbels can tell she enjoys the attention. Perhaps she believes herself to be on stage at her theatre.

He finds her impossibly attractive in this moment, stood on the board, looking out across the room of guests. They are beholden to her. This frustrates him and he searches for a different feeling, discovering only a terror and an anger that bubbles up quickly into a void.

“Lyla,” he whispers urgently, “the position is vulnerable.”

She turns her head to him and smiles, kissing him on the cheek. “Play the game,” she says.

A fury rises in him, one that he knows he cannot unleash here in the art gallery, among these people. It would satisfy their suspicions of him. He recalls their snide glances as the party rose to power. They thought of him as *unintelligent* and the memory disgusts him.

He catches a smile in the crowd, glares at it, and it seems to broaden with his anger.

“Joseph,” says Lyla, gently, “it’s our move.”

Goebbels walks across the board, stopping half-way through the move to look back at Lyla, to warn her somehow of her mistake. But she makes a shooing motion with her hand, urging him onwards to another square on the board, where Goebbels knows for certain she will set in motion events that lead to the loss of his game.

Looking across at the inventor's daughter, Goebbels can see her barely concealed excitement at the new positions opening up in the game.

Is she ridiculing him? He cannot tell for sure. He usually finds children so simple, their emotions played out visibly. To Goebbels, children seem like damaged U-boats, forced always to the surface. But Amelia is different, he feels her fleet moving somewhere deep, perhaps even beneath him. But, as quickly as it came, this thought is gone. *Ridiculous*. She is only a little girl from Prague. She is small and far, far from home.

Reassured that the girl has not seen the opening to attack, he steps forward into his square, but no sooner has he done so than the girl's eyes flicker to life.

Amelia whispers to a bishop (a thin woman in a blue lace dress) stood close by her. The bishop then crosses the board. This, as Goebbels has foreseen, allows Lyla's castle (a small man in a jacket and bow-tie) to cross the board and threaten Goebbels from another direction.

Goebbels spots a possible exit, and tries to catch Lyla's eye, but she is fixated on the board. He feels the sensation of watching a fool struggle to complete a puzzle and he resists the urge to push her out of the way and get the job done himself. Lyla is about to lose the match, and the mood has darkened for Goebbels. He cannot point to the change in things precisely, but he feels his honor at stake here.

"Lyla," he whispers furiously. "Move me to the edge, there."

He points at a square on the far edge of the board. “Then move this bishop—”

“Herr Goebbels,” Lyla says, interrupting him loudly and playfully. “You are a very handsome king, but I must insist you follow the orders of your Queen.”

“But I cannot allow it,” Goebbels says.

“It is my game, no?” says Lyla, “I think I see an escape.”

“She is cornering you,” says Goebbels, pointing at Amelia. “She is manipulating the game to her plan.”

“Joseph, she is a little girl, I hardly think she is manipulating anything,” says Lyla.

“The girl has been planning these positions. You have fallen into her trap. She is mocking you.”

Through his fury, he is now dimly aware of a shift in the audience. They are sinking back, resisting him. Clearly they side with the child—as the weak-minded will always side with a child—but he recognizes the danger: To lose the support of his public is to lose the engine of power. Their mindless threshing and whims of want are the crude oil that pumps through the cylinders of the war. He knows their need to be impressed by him. Goebbels calms himself and turns to the guests.

He walks over to Amelia and picks her up. She feels awkward and coarse in his hands, like a tangle of sharp unpleasant wires. He holds her up to the audience.

“This is Amelia,” he says. “She is all the way from Prague.

She comes here with her father, the great inventor, who has created the Mechanical Man that will play chess against me in the Sportpalast at the rally on Friday.”

He smiles and looks up at Amelia. Her face is expressionless. He feels her weight, bearing down on him. He feels she is crushing his foot, weakening him.

“Please, show your appreciation for Amelia,” Goebbels says, lowering the girl to the floor. A loud applause breaks out and Goebbels seizes his opportunity. Leaning down to the little girl he says, clearly and firmly into her ear, “Lose the match.”

Amelia looks up at him in confusion. He grabs her arm hard, pulls her towards him and whispers again, “Lose the match, Amelia. I order you.”

She struggles in his grip.

Something in Goebbels wants to squeeze and squeeze, but he composes himself, drops his hand and Amelia runs back to her square.

The applause dies down and Goebbels crosses the board back to his square. It is Amelia’s move, and he watches her closely. She is staring right at him, in a manner he finds quite off-putting. He dips his head slightly, signaling to her, but she does not respond.

Still staring at him, she whispers to a pawn, then a castle. Goebbels’ eyes widen, he feels a panic envelop him, he cannot seem to move or speak.

The unthinkable is happening around him on the board.

Amelia advances a pawn, Lyla moves a bishop forwards to defend Goebbels, but a moment later, Amelia makes a mistake only a novice would. The evidence is clear, it cannot be disputed, the girl has lost the game. There is applause and Goebbels bows.

Goebbels feels Lyla's hand envelop his own, he shivers. There is a cold breeze in here somewhere, they must shut the windows, he thinks, looking around for a waiter to protest to. But, Lyla pulls him close.

“You were right, Joseph,” Lyla says. “I should have moved that bishop back rather than—”

He snatches his hand from her grasp.

“Joseph,” she says. “What's wrong?”

“You have insulted me. You have insulted our guests.” he manages to say. The room feels dim, claustrophobic. His skin itches.

“Joseph, I'm certain I did not mean to anger you.”

“You disobeyed a direct order,” whispers Goebbels. “You were mocking me.”

“A direct order?” asks Lyla. “What order? What orders do men give women at parties?”

“I told you very clearly you were not to defy me,”spits Goebbels. “You should be beaten by my belt to learn respect. It is the most effective form of education. Now, bend over and pull down your pants.”

Goebbels begins to unfast”

“Joseph,” Lyla says, soothing him. “Joseph. The guests are watching.”

Goebbels shrugs her off.

“Insolent boy!” he bellows.

He grabs Lyla by the hair. The crowd shuffles back quickly and one of the guests screams, it is the woman in the cocktail dress, Amelia's bishop.

“Stop!” she cries. “Stop!”

Goebbels looks down at Lyla. There are tears running down her face, but she remains resolutely quiet.

“You have been a very, very naughty boy,” says Goebbels. “Now bend over and pull down your pants. I am going to beat some sense into you.”

A tall man appears, holding a pipe in one hand, presumably the woman's husband.

“Goodness me,” he says, quite calmly. “What have we got here? A misunderstanding I am sure.”

“Have this man arrested,” Goebbels shouts, pointing.

“Herr Goebbels, with the greatest of respect, that won't be necessary. I have your interests at heart and, you might remember, my industry in the Americas continues to finance the Reich's war efforts. I could not be more vested in your interests Herr Goebbels, nor you in mine.”

The tall man stops a moment to let the crowd digest his words, taking a long toke on his pipe.

“First, I must commend you on the exhibition,” the man

continues. “It is exquisite. A wonderful collection. A *terrible* collection,” the man continues, holding his pipe up high. “I understand completely your frustrations. Women can be ever so troubling at times, and the girl was provocative. I was astonished by her performance. It is despicable for a woman, during a game, to manipulate circumstances to her advantage and so disadvantage those who have been so kind as to tolerate her. I ask, Herr Goebbels, that, given that this gallery is partly under my patronage, that you will forgive this disturbance and we can return to the party?”

“Your name?” asks Goebbels.

“Henry Ford,” says the man.

Goebbels calls an SS officer over and whispers into his ear. The man nods.

Goebbels releases his grip on Lyla and she walks away into the crowd. Goebbels feels calmer, more controlled now, his rage cooling.

The calm allows Goebbels to survey the faces of the guests, he sees their shock and dismay, many of them refusing to meet his gaze.

He searches for Lyla and spots her sat by a grand piano at the other end of the room, her head buried in her hands. He realizes then that he feels some connection to the insidious girl. Is it love?

“Ladies and gentlemen,” Goebbels says. “Of course the girl must not be punished. She simply mistook her place—a

mistake that is easy for a woman to make.”

The next words form a displeasing sensation on his lips, and he speaks them mechanically, distantly, like some great cogs inside him force them up and out into the air.

“I apologize,” he says. “We are at war, and while at war it is hard to remember that we are not at war with everything, at all times.”

Goebbels begins to stride about the room. Warming to his own voice.

“One can, of course, fire at the opponent with machine guns until he recognizes the superiority of those who have the machine guns. That is the crudest way.”

“But one can also transform a nation through a revolution of the mind. Not by destroying our opponent, but by winning him over. So, Lyla, if you will allow me to win your mind over with words, I ask you to forgive me,” Goebbels says, turning to Lyla. “My dear Lyla, perhaps I can improve my apology by arranging for you and young Amelia to go on an excursion tomorrow. A tour of Berlin?”

He feels the guests’ sympathy return, the crowd accepting him. They want more. They feel alive with the excitement that quick relief from fear can bring. The masses always need something that will give them a thrill of horror, and then comfort. Warming to his new theme, Goebbels walks over to where Franz is held by two SS officers.

“Franz. My apologies also. It is a difficult time for us in

Berlin."

Franz has a curious expression in his eyes, Goebbels cannot unravel it. The chatter of guests begins to drown out Goebbels' thoughts, a waiter brushes past him, a man shakes his hand, a champagne glass is thrust in his direction, someone begins playing cello, and it seems impossible to recall the mood of just a few moments ago. Goebbels finds himself amid the crowd, warm and adrift.

•

Franz pushes open the French windows and walks out onto the balcony of the great gallery. There is a light snowfall, and he sticks his hands in his pockets to keep them warm. Berlin stretches out down Gneisenaustraße and, in the distance, long beams of searchlights reach up into the clouds. He pulls his coat tightly around his body, looking back into the gallery.

From here, he can see Amelia sat crossed-legged in a group of women who are dotting on her. She seems to be enjoying the attention. The shock of Goebbels' outburst remains with Franz. The thought of hiding Amelia in the Mechanical Man for the match in the Sportpalast strikes at his heart, and he resolves to gather up Amelia and continue work on the machine immediately. This evening.

Franz takes a step towards the windows, back to the party, but catches sight of a solitary figure at the end of the balcony. A woman wrapped in thick fur coat, shivering in the evening air. She faces away from him, and a plume of cigarette smoke snakes around her head. He quietly retreats back towards the door, but then the woman turns. It is Lyla.

“He can be very cruel,” she says. “But the pressures on him are enormous. He is a very great man.”

Franz says nothing.

“I know what you’re thinking,” says Lyla. “You despise us. It may all seem terrible now, but one day you will thank the Deutsches Reich for what it has done for you.”

She struggles to light another cigarette, her hands shaking. A wind picks up and defeats the flame, she throws the unlit cigarette off the balcony in disgust.

“Such an infernal winter,” she says, then calming herself. “They never seem like they will end do they? When I was a girl in Bavaria, we would look forward to the winters. Sledging, skiing and hikes through the forest in our snow shoes, but now I rather dislike the whole thing. My shoes are quite different now, and you cannot ski in Berlin.” She sighs. “What do you suppose they are thinking, those men out there with the lights?”

Lyla gestures out to the searchlights dancing over the cloud layer above the city.

“They hope to spot a plane and sound the alarm,” says

Franz.

“Do you think there is a pleasure in that?” asks Lyla. “To do your part?”

Franz walks over to Lyla and looks up at the lights.

“I think they are afraid,” says Franz.

“Afraid?” says Lyla. “They are soldiers. I very much doubt they fear anything. We do not fear things here in Berlin, Franz. What a ridiculous idea. *Afraid?*” She shakes her head and looks at Franz.

“I do my part for Germany too,” Lyla says. “Of course, many of the people in there do.” she looks through the windows into the party. “They may think very little of what I do. Acting in the cinema. They think it a distraction, an amusement. But Joseph knows the power of the moving image.”

“The generals and commanders in there with their champagne and medals,” Lyla smiles. “They think war happens out in the fields and cities of Europe. They think war is fought by a little man with a rifle, stood in uniform. But Herr Goebbels knows where war really happens, Franz. It happens in here.” Lyla takes her finger and presses it lightly against the side of Franz’s head.

“This is where men wage war. In here. The gun is only a weapon, and perhaps the weakest of all of them. A gun changes a man’s mind only by force, and often not even then. Otherwise we would not have so many dead. The cinema

though, it has elegance. It is *propaganda*. It is spreading the true German spirit. Joseph knows that it changes a man's mind by the application of the lightest touch."

Lyla steps close to Franz. He can feel her breath on him.

"The strongest forces," she says, moving closer.

"...change a man's mind..."

Running her finger down his forehead.

"...with the gentlest touch."

"Some minds cannot be changed," Franz says, stepping back. "Some horrors are too great."

"Oh you think so, Franz?" Lyla says. "You think that Berlin is a horror?" She laughs.

Franz is silent.

"Where is the child's mother?"

Franz looks through the windows of the party.

Amelia is stood by the piano, her small head resting on the side of the case, listening to a recital. Around her, guests push and bustle, gobbling canapés, sipping wines.

"Well, where is her mother?" asks Lyla. "It's a simple question."

"She is dead," says Franz.

Lyla looks out to the floodlights scanning the dark clouds above Alexanderplatz.

"How did she die?" asks Lyla.

"Supplies in Prague are limited," says Franz, quietly. "There

was nothing to be done. Even with a hospital it would have been impossible. She was sick for months.”

Lyla cranes her neck to the searchlights, watching them intently. Her eyes reflect their beams and Franz watches them. For a moment it is as if all Berlin exists somehow within them. Lyla blinks and Berlin is gone.

“It is frightfully cold out here,” Lyla says. “You must excuse me.”

She brushes past Franz. As she does, something possesses him, rising up from a deep place, and he stands in front of her, blocking the way.

“Why are you here?” he asks her.

“Please excuse me, I must return to the guests,” says Lyla, refusing to look at Franz.

“Why are you here?” he asks again.

She looks down at the floor. Her shoulders heave slowly upwards and she lets out a small, sharp breath.

“Why am I here? Why are you here?” she asks. “Why are any of us here?”

Franz finds her hand in his. It is cold and fragile.

“I am here for for the Reich. To help build a better empire. It may seem so very terrible to live under this war, but the plan is *beautiful*. After the war we will have a new age. Have you seen Herr Speer’s designs for the Volkshalle? There is such beauty on the horizon for Germany and for its citizens. Even for you Franz. You are a citizen of Germany too. We will all

live in a paradise.”

Franz pulls his hand away from Lyla.

“I am not a citizen of Germany,” he says.

“Of course it is hard to imagine such things. Only Joseph and the other ministers truly see the future for us all. We must trust them, they have a great future planned for us.”

“A great future?” says Franz.

“I will collect your daughter at ten tomorrow morning. I will show her the true Berlin and we shall have lunch and watch the birds in Tiergarten.”

Lyla opens the French windows and steps back through into the gallery. The warmth and noise of the party floods out. She closes the doors behind her.

The snow gathers pace and Franz watches the flakes covering the city. The air has chilled now and his breath comes out in dense clouds. He looks back into the party and imagines what might happen if he just stood here, not moving. Would the snow pile higher and higher, over his head, freezing him forever?

Lyla has left her cigarette case on the balcony. Franz picks it up and holds it, imagining what it might be like to be the owner of this case. What it would be to have Lyla's bright future, her faith in the Reich. Franz remembers the days when the Nazis first arrived in Prague. The terror and destruction, the expulsion of his friends and neighbors. Mariana's illness getting worse. He remembers boots marching, the shrill crack

of rifle fire, the terror that a knock on the door would bring.

He opens the cigarette case. It is almost full—only two cigarettes have been smoked. He holds the case out into the air, among the snowflakes and cold, and tips the contents slowly over the balcony. He tips it all out into the night. Lyla's tiny sticks of tobacco bounce against the facade of the gallery and land soundlessly in the drifts below. They vanish quickly under layers of fresh white snow.

He takes the case and puts it in his coat pocket. It feels cold and terrible.

Franz watches the searchlights in the sky join beams, meeting high up in the clouds, picking out a shadow moving fast across the sky. A rattle of anti-aircraft gunfire shakes the night and a siren wails far away.

Inside, the piano player stops and the guests begin to calmly shuffle out of the gallery. Franz sees Amelia looking around for him in the room, he opens the windows, steps through and picks her up.

Goebbels stands by the Mechanical Man, ordering SS men to transport the device back to the inventor's apartment.

“Don't worry,” says Goebbels, spotting Franz. “They rarely bomb the Museums. There must be someone in the British command who admires Picasso.” Goebbels laughs. “Be careful with the machine,” he warns the soldiers, “gentle.”

An explosion far away sends a deep rumble through the gallery and Goebbels stamps his foot. “Why do they

perpetuate this nonsense?”

The SS men lift the Mechanical Man onto a trolley and push it down the corridors. Franz follows with Amelia held tight in his arms. She buries her head in his chest, at first, he thinks, with fear. But he soon senses that she is in a deep sleep.

He carries the child down the corridors of the gallery, into a maintenance elevator and out onto the streets. Goebbels ushers them into a waiting car and they slip, tires spinning, into the snowstorm. The dull thud of distant bombing runs shake the roads and Franz can see the sky in the east illuminated with bright flashes.

For a moment it is as if it is daylight. He presses his cheek to Amelia's head and listens to the girl's gentle breathing. He hopes her dreams are kind to her. She shifts uncomfortably, as if tangled in string or struggling through water. Franz strokes her hair.

“Amelia,” he says. “Sleep sound.”

She settles. Franz looks back through the window of the car, down the long streets, out as far as he can see.

The sky is on fire.

In the apartment now, Goebbels undresses. His body fragile and twisted in the moonlight. Lyla waits, shivering under the bedsheets.

She reflects, now, that expressing love has never been an experience of pleasure for her, but always one of desperation. Joseph clings to her skin. She feels as she is on the edge of some great rocky precipice over an infinite void of sadness. This rock face grows harder to cling to until, finally, she slips off, feeling utterly alone.

When Goebbels touches her, it is as if she looks down at her body below, while her mind floats far away on the ceiling. Her mind refuses to budge from its vantage point; above.

And this is how she has always lived in such moments: Outside; looking in.

Lyla feels she is a collapsed wooden puppet with its strings trailing sadly back to its own hands. And now Goebbels is asleep, they lie alone, together. Two wooden people in a wooden world.

•

Amelia stands on the street outside the Hotel Adlon. The morning is bright and Berlin seems suddenly cheerful—for a moment she can imagine that there is no war; that she is just a girl waiting on the street for her mother, or her aunt, to pick her up and take her for lunch. Amelia makes a small circle in the snow with her foot, twisting the heel of her shoe and listening to the crunch of the sugary drift.

“Good morning, Amelia!” shouts Lyla, walking down the street towards her. “I am so late! Are you hungry?”

Amelia nods.

“We’ll walk and have lunch. It’s such a beautiful day, don’t you think Amelia? A girl can really live on a day like this — you can imagine what the next year holds?”

“Are you Herr Goebbels’ wife?” asks Amelia.

“Whatever makes you say that?” asks Lyla, slowing her pace. “What a thing to think.” She smiles though, pleased that Amelia has asked. “Joseph and I, we are friends. Do you have any special friends Amelia, perhaps back in Prague?”

Amelia shakes her head.

“Not even at school?” asks Lyla. “You must have friends in school?”

“The school is closed,” says Amelia.

“Why, yes. I imagine it is. Well, never-mind, Amelia.” Lyla leads them across the street. “I will be your friend. Would you like that? Of course you would. I’m like you. I’m new to Berlin and I don’t have many friends here yet. I’d like us to be friends. Do you know what I do, Amelia?”

Amelia looks at Lyla for a moment.

“Are you a Nazi?”

Lyla laughs. “Yes, of course, we are all Nazis Amelia. But it is hardly a job—well, for some it is—well, I suppose I am two things then. I am a member of the party, but I also work. I’m an actress at the Babelsberg film studios.”

“An actress?” asks Amelia. “What films are you in? Are you famous?”

“My, you are suddenly very inquisitive, Amelia! Yes, I suppose I am *famous*, at least here in Berlin. See how people are watching us walk — they are quite mesmerized. They also wonder who you are, my new friend! One day I hope to travel to America. That is where the heart of the film industry is. Of course Joseph thinks Americans are terribly gauche, but I adore the magic of the screen, and Hollywood is the place to be.”

“I have never seen a film,” says Amelia. “But I think I should like to.”

“Never seen a film?” says Lyla, stopping to stare at Amelia in disbelief. “You’ve seen a newsreel though?”

“Never,” says Amelia. “I’ve never.”

“Astonishing,” says Lyla, raising an eyebrow and peering at Amelia as if she were the most peculiar thing. “Well, we must see a film then. My newest is showing at the cinema at noon. We will go to the pictures. What a thrill, Amelia. I will be quite delighted to watch you experience your first film.”

Lyla begins walking again, through the bustling crowds of the market and out into the square. She swings open the door of a restaurant and beckons Amelia inside. Warm air wraps them kindly and Amelia discovers that the restaurant is a cosy, pretty room, filled with tables packed closely together.

The place is quaint. Not grand and overwhelming like the rooms of the Hotel Adlon. Amelia’s eyes adjust to the dim light and she sees that the walls are filled with photographs of glamorous-looking people, posing, dancing and singing.

“We are in excellent company,” says Lyla, noticing Amelia’s interest in the photographs. “These people are like my family. All great German film actors. One day my photograph will be among them.”

“Your photograph,” says a large man appearing from the kitchens at the back of the restaurant, “will be among them as soon as you provide a photograph, Lyla.”

“Azzo!” says Lyla, embracing the man, then tugging on his apron playfully. “I have brought a special visitor today.”

“What a beautiful girl,” says Azzo, looking down at Amelia. “Is she an actress too? Or is she perhaps a government

minister?”

“Ha!” Lyla says, looking around nervously. “She is the daughter of the man who invented the Mechanical Man that plays chess.”

“Ah,” says Azzo, walking over to a table and picking up a newspaper. “I read about this *Mechanical Man* in the newspaper today. Here it is.” He snaps open the newspaper in such a theatrical way—closing one eye and staring at Amelia intently—that she quite forgets herself and giggles.

“A life-size mechanical man,” Azzo reads in an exaggerated voice, “that is able to play chess far beyond the standard of Grand Master, will be demonstrated before the rally in the Sportpalast this Friday. The machine, made by the inventor Franz, under the command of the Reich, is an example of the wonderful new technologies emerging as the German expansion continues. The machine will play Minister Goebbels in a single game of wits, proving the ingenuity of the Nazi machines and the ongoing superiority of the German vision, and so forth. Well, it goes on a bit.” He drops the newspaper, sits at an empty table nearby, slumps and pretends to fall instantly asleep. Amelia smiles.

“You are very lucky to have such wonderful guests for lunch,” says Lyla.

“Indeed I am,” says Azzo, pretending to wake up; rubbing his eyes. “Well, you must have the finest table. Come with me.”

He stands up and leads them to a table in the corner of the restaurant. He lights a small candle and places it in the middle. He reaches behind his back and then quickly fans his hands out, they both contain menus which he hands to Lyla and Amelia.

“I shall leave you to explore the menus,” he says, opening his arms and bounding back into the kitchen.

Amelia studies the menu hard.

“Do you know this man?” asks Lyla, pointing at a photograph next to their table. The photograph shows a man stood on a stage. Amelia examines the photograph. The audience around the man are on their feet, applauding.

“It is Kurt Gerron,” says Lyla. “He is quite excellent. I saw him years ago in the *The Blue Angel*, I found him quite inspiring, Amelia. Although I admit I have not thought of him for many years. How wonderful that we should share lunch with him. He played wonderfully with Marlene Dietrich”

“He looks a little sad,” says Amelia.

“Sad?” asks Lyla, peering closely at the picture. “Well, I suppose, yes, he does look a little sad. Perhaps he is overwhelmed by the appreciation of the audience. Sometimes I am like that when a film is first screened. I can be so nervous about things like that. You wouldn't guess that, would you Amelia, that I could be nervous?”

Azzo returns to their table, carrying a jug of water which, on seeing Lyla and Amelia's interest in the photograph, he

nearly drops.

"I am so sorry, Fräulein."

He quickly takes the photograph off the wall and clutches it to his chest, his face turning a bright red. "This is of course unacceptable." Azzo is visibly shaking as he says this "I hope that you see no need to take this any further. It was here from before the... Well, before... I am deeply regretful. I will have it destroyed."

"Destroyed?" ask Lyla in bewilderment. "Why ever would you destroy it, Azzo?"

Azzo looks as if he is glued by his feet to the floor of the restaurant, clearly wanting to dart one way or another, but unable to muster the nerve.

He speaks in a small, terrified voice, "Well because of the unspeakable matter of... because of his un-German activities and heritage. Lyla, he has fled the Fatherland, stripped of his honour by Herr Goebbels himself."

"Fled?" says Lyla. "Why would he flee? He is one of Germany's finest actors."

"He is gone, Fräulein. In disgrace."

"Disgrace indeed. Give me that photograph."

"Lyla, I want to give you this photograph, but I fear that it may be used in evidence against me."

"What ridiculousness is this?" asks Lyla. "You are plainly mistaken Azzo."

"Yes," says Azzo. "Sorry. Of course, Lyla, I am mistaken. I

apologize. Some appetizers?”

He runs into the kitchen, still clutching the photograph. Amelia looks at Lyla, she seems deep in thought. Amelia hears the faint sound of glass breaking somewhere in the back of the kitchen.

Azzo reappears, carrying two bowls of soup.

“Here, a delicious soup for you both,” he says, smiling broadly.

“Azzo,” says Lyla, “Where is the photograph?”

“The photograph?” asks Azzo.

It is genuinely as if he does not recall anything about a photograph, thinks Amelia.

“The photograph that was here,” says Lyla, pointing at where the photograph of the man on the stage once was. Now there is only a light square where the sun has not bleached the wallpaper.

Azzo stares blankly, saying nothing.

“I am not mistaken,” says Lyla, pointing at the square on the wall.

Azzo arranges the soup bowls on the table and adjusts the cutlery.

“It is so easy to be mistaken in Berlin these days,” says Azzo, now unfolding napkins and placing one on Amelia's lap and the other on Lyla's.

Amelia picks up her soup spoon, but Lyla reaches across and holds Amelia's hand lightly down on the table, stopping

her mid-way.

“So, I am mistaken, Azzo?” she asks again.

“Please, Fräulein,” says Azzo, tears welling in his eyes. “Please.”

The door of the restaurant swings open, a tiny shrill bell rings, and two soldiers bustle inside, laughing loudly and slapping each other on the back as if having reached the punchline of some tremendous joke.

“A table,” says one of the soldiers. “A large table,” says the other. “We may be—” He notices Lyla and stands to attention and salutes her. “Heil Hitler!” he shouts, nudging his friend, who also stands to attention and salutes. “I apologize for our intrusion, we will dine elsewhere.”

The soldiers go to leave, but Lyla stands up and raises her arm, “Heil Hitler!”

They stop in their tracks. Now they notice Azzo, stood in the middle of his own restaurant, shaking.

“Is there a problem here?” asks the taller soldier.

“There may be a problem, yes,” says Lyla. “Azzo is behaving in an extremely strange way about a photograph.”

There is an almighty crash and Amelia shrieks. Her soup bowl has fallen off the table into her lap. Now hot soup is running down her legs. She jumps up from her chair, the soldiers stand motionless, but Lyla rushes over to swab the soup off the girl's dress with a napkin.

“Amelia, goodness me. You gave me quite a fright.”

“I’m burnt,” says Amelia. “The pain! My legs! I’m dying!”

“Let’s have a look,” says Lyla, reaching for Amelia’s dress.

“No!” says Amelia, looking across at the soldiers. “The shame of it. Can we go to the bathroom?”

“In a moment, Amelia,” says Lyla, turning to Azzo.

But Amelia lets out a small wail and Lyla rolls her eyes.

“Very well, very well,” Lyla mutters and walks Amelia to the back of the restaurant. They shuffle into a small bathroom and Lyla wets a towel with cold water and lifts up Amelia’s dress. She finds two thick layers beneath the outer fabric, which she pulls up to get to the skin. She goes to dab Amelia’s legs, but discovers that the innermost layer is not damp at all and Amelia’s legs are dry.

“You’re not burnt in the slightest, Amelia,” Lyla says in surprise, dropping the pleats of the dress in anger. “Why did you say you were burnt?”

“I didn’t want you to hurt him,” says Amelia.

Somewhere far off, there is the sound of a small bell ringing. Lyla shakes her head and walks Amelia back into the restaurant. The soldiers are gone and Azzo sits alone at a table. He reaches into his pocket and pulls out a folded photograph.

“Here,” he says, holding it out to Lyla. “Here is the photograph.”

Lyla takes it from him and puts it in her bag. Azzo keeps his eyes on the tablecloth. He seems somewhere far away.

“Thank you, Azzo,” Lyla says. “We will finish our meal

now. Please bring Amelia another soup.”

“There is no need to take this any further.” Azzo says quietly.

“Azzo, it is my business when this matter will end,” says Lyla, raising her tone. “And I will decide what the correct course of action is. Now, *the soup*.”

Azzo walks slowly into the kitchen.

“What an awful business,” Lyla says shaking her head. “Berlin is a difficult place to be at times—even Joseph struggles. So many things to keep track of.”

She puts her fingers on the light patch on the wallpaper where the photograph was.

“One day a person might appear to be a friend of the Reich, the next he is discovered to be corrupting the moral fabric. It is hard to keep on top of every change. Anyway, enough of that. You must tell me all about your adventures so far, Amelia. Come and sit.”

Amelia sits.

“Amelia,” says Lyla, adjusting her napkin, “tell me about Prague.”

“Is Azzo in trouble?” asks Amelia.

Lyla straightens her napkin across her knees, carefully smoothing every crease with her fingers until the white expanse is perfect. They sit in silence.

“I saw a boy shot in Prague,” says Amelia. And, now she has started, she cannot stop the words coming, they flood out of

her. “He stole a man’s watch and he ran and they shot him. He looked at me in the station—before—and he waved and he was just a boy. They killed him for a watch.”

Lyla turns to look out of the window of the restaurant and across the square. She is quiet for a long time.

“There must be order in the cities,” Lyla says finally, still looking out at the square. “Joseph says that is the price of a stable empire. Difficult decisions must be made to further the expansion. We live in a difficult time, Amelia, but this is a transition. Do you know what a *transition* is, Amelia? It is the space between two things, a bridge between two places. Building the bridge is difficult and distasteful to some. But, the bridge leads to a better place. Once we are all across, we will quickly forget what it took to build it.”

“I know I will remember that boy,” says Amelia.

Lyla sighs.

“The Reich can hardly be accountable for every act of peacekeeping on the streets of Prague. Besides, he was a *thief*, correct, Amelia? No more talk of this kind of thing.”

“What will you do when the war is over?” asks Amelia.

“I will travel to America,” says Lyla, brightening. “I will audition in Hollywood for a motion picture. Joseph has friends in the industry. He is very well respected by the American film studios. The American studios are great fans of my films. But for the moment, Germany needs me here.”

Lyla leans in close to Amelia, as if confiding a great secret.

“Did you know, Amelia, that Joseph decides what films will be shown in Germany? He reviews every single can of film that crosses the border and leaves the studios. It is a tremendous service to the people. On top of all his responsibilities as a minister, he takes time out of his day to ensure that the people only see the very finest cinema. Can you imagine?”

Amelia shakes her head.

“And do you know what he gave Adolf for his birthday? A set of the *Mickey Mouse* cartoon films! Do you know them?”

Amelia shakes her head again.

“No, of course not, you have never seen a film, and besides I do not think you can see the Mickey Mouse films in a cinema in Berlin. Joseph has decided they would corrupt the moral fabric. Adolf loves them though, he screens them often for the inner ministers.”

Azzo arrives with a fresh bowl of soup for Amelia. He places it in front of her and retreats back to the kitchen.

“Splendid,” says Lyla.

They begin to eat their soup.

“This is quite delicious,” says Lyla. “Though I do not care for Azzo’s tone earlier. I think he was quite rude. I may take this photograph to Joseph. I am sure it is quite harmless, and an innocent mistake. Even I myself was not aware that this actor has been discovered to be a traitor to the German people—in fact I admit I once admired the man—but it is not my place to keep myself informed on every actor or writer who has

spoiled the German spirit.”

Lyla pours herself a glass of wine.

“There are many of them, you see, Amelia. So many of them that we thought were our friends, but turned out to be enemies—and often in ways that I am too naive to realize myself. It is so fortunate that we have guardians like Joseph looking out for us or we would be quickly destroyed by the influence of these people who would disgrace the country.”

Lyla stops for a moment. She looks troubled.

“Why should I know,” she continues angrily, as if reacting to a question, “who is acceptable or not from day to day?”

Amelia stares into her soup.

“I thought this actor was a star, I did not know of his recent crimes. However, a man who displays photographs in his restaurant for all to see; a man like that should be very careful to ensure that his walls do not contain the images of criminals. I am sure you agree with me, Amelia. I will probably take the matter up with Joseph this evening.”

Amelia notices Lyla’s necklace: An elegant silver chain with a small, silver bird attached to it. Lyla sees that Amelia is staring at it.

“That’s me,” says Lyla, holding up the small silver bird. “Lyla Vogel, the little bird. My mother gave this to me.”

Lyla’s necklace glints in the light. A bird on a chain.

“Where is your mother?” asks Lyla.

Amelia says nothing. She finishes her soup in silence. Lyla places a crisp banknote on the tablecloth and they leave the restaurant.

Outside, Berlin is bright and alive. They walk across the square, leaving a neat pair of footprints in the snow. Amelia slows down to look into the windows of the shops, but Lyla presses onwards. Many of the shops are full of mysterious objects and foods—completely unlike the shops in Prague.

Amelia runs to catch up with Lyla and they turn a corner. Here a small queue is forming outside a grand-looking building. Amelia reads the sign above the building's grand archway. It announces a film title in huge, bright letters: *The Golden City — Starring Lyla Vogel*.

This makes Amelia feel quite excited, despite her uncertainty. She is impressed as they cross the deep red carpets inside the theatre and wait by the ticket booth. Amelia stands on the tips of her toes and peers over the counter. A woman in a neat uniform, rather like a train guard's, stands at the back of the booth, fixing a poster to the wall.

Without turning around, the woman asks, "How many?"

"One adult and one child," Lyla says, reaching into her bag.

The woman behind the counter turns and gasps.

"Two tickets," says Lyla.

"Goodness," the woman continues. "Lyla Vogel! What a pleasure." She nervously tears two tickets off a large spool and passes them across the counter. "It is a wonderful performance,

Lyla Vogel. *Wonderful!*"

"Good day," says Lyla, passing one of the tickets to Amelia who turns it over in her hands, studying it like a precious trophy.

Amelia is led into a cavernous space, covered in red velvet and gold decorations. She sits down in a comfortable seat among hundreds of other people. They face an enormous curtain and wait. Amelia can hardly believe that a place like this exists. She would be happy to sit for an hour in this room and simply marvel at it. But soon the light dims. The people stop chattering and shapes flicker across the screen.

Somewhere, far above them, something clatters and vibrates. There are white flashes and the curtains on the stage draw back. The screen is filled with a large photograph—the biggest photograph Amelia has ever seen. It shows the title of the film. Soon the photograph vanishes and is replaced by another one. This photograph shows an enormous image of Lyla.

Amelia stares in fascination, and then the strangest thing happens. The giant photograph of Lyla blinks, and moves. Amelia jumps half out of her seat and buries her head in Lyla's lap.

Lyla laughs and tries to force Amelia up.

"It is only a projection, Amelia. Don't be ridiculous," Lyla says, straining to lift the girl while looking around the cinema awkwardly. Amelia buries her head deeper in Lyla's lap.

“Amelia, you are quite embarrassing yourself. Sit up.”

Amelia allows herself another glimpse of the screen, lets out a little gasp and hides in Lyla's lap again. She cannot understand how anyone can take any pleasure in such a terrifying sight. She presses her head into Lyla.

“For goodness sake, Amelia,” she hears Lyla say. Then a short sharp pain shoot out across her cheek.

“Now sit up,” says Lyla, “or you will be slapped again.”

Amelia sits up and puts a hand to her face. The cheek feels hot to the touch. Her eyes well up with tears.

“Watch the film, Amelia. That is what we have come here for,” Lyla says.

Lyla turns to glance at the audience nearby.

Amelia looks at the screen. Through her tears it is blurry.

By the time she has stopped crying, Amelia finds she cannot take her eyes off the images on the screen. She begins to imagine a story that explains the moving photographs she is watching. At first it is difficult to follow, but it appears to Amelia that it is like a play she was once taken to in Prague, before the war. The film reminds her of home.

Lyla is playing the part of a young, country girl who falls in love with a man and runs away. But things go wrong for the girl and she ends up drowning herself in a swamp.

The theatre lights come up and Amelia is hustled out through the doors of the cinema. Snow is falling. The street seems unexpectedly bright.

Amelia assumed it to be evening, on account of the darkness in the cinema, but it is still afternoon. She blinks in the cold air. Lyla takes her hand and leads her down the street.

“Why did you kill yourself in the film?” asks Amelia.

“My character killed herself, Amelia. I’m still very much here,” says Lyla.

“Yes, but why did she?”

“I suppose the girl was very sad that she had lost the man she loved. Originally the story was that my character’s father killed himself, but Joseph felt it would be more dramatic if I did.”

The snow falls heavily now and it is difficult to see far down the street. Faces swim in and out of view, some staring directly at Amelia, then vanishing into the white. The fresh flakes feel like a meringue breaking under Amelia’s feet as she struggles to keep up with Lyla. The wind picks up and they both vanish into the white of the snowstorm.

•

Franz sits facing the Mechanical Man. It reaches out an arm

and moves a pawn two spaces forwards. Franz counters, advancing a rook. The mechanical man reaches out and picks up another pawn, lifting it high above the board, then losing grip on it. The piece tumbles through the air, hits the board and bounces off the table. Franz catches it with a snap of his arm, examines it and then throws it across the room. It lands at the feet of Speer.

Speer picks it up and examines it.

“Damn!” shouts Franz, standing up.

“Problems?” asks Speer.

“It’s badly damaged by the raid on the ballroom,” says Franz. “It can output moves correctly, but it can’t translate them into movement. I will continue work.”

Speer walks around the apartment, inspecting the Mechanical Man. At last, he walks over to the machine and lifts the clockwork arm, causing gears inside to whirr and twist.

“Please be careful. The machine is very sensitive,” says Franz.

“Very sensitive” asks Speer. “It won’t last long against Herr Goebbels with such a disposition.”

Speer drops the Mechanical Man’s arm with a thud, walks to the window and stares out into the evening. After a moment he pulls out a pocket watch, and snaps it open.

“You do know why I am here? You know what is happening right now as you and I stand here in Berlin?” asks Speer. “In the east, six hundred men advance on a Russian

town according to the strategy produced by the Mechanical Man.”

Speer paces quickly over to the Mechanical Man.

“The strategy is in his head”, Speer says, tapping the Mechanical Man’s skull. “What are you up to in there?”

There is no answer.

Speer looks down at Franz. “Six hundred men, Inventor. No small number. I hope for our sake that your calculations were correct. We should have word soon.”

Speer continues pacing about the room. A slow terror creeps over Franz.

“We had little time to calibrate,” says Franz.

“Calibrate!” booms Speer. “*Calibrate?* There are soldiers out there, Franz, moving into battle according to the simulation. Have you any idea how Goebbels will react to failure?”

Speer returns to the window and stares out. He then looks down at the chess board on the small table nearby and places a pawn next to it. He flicks open his pocket watch again.

“Four sixteen,” Speer says. “They will have begun the advance on the town. Two hundred to begin with, from the north. They will assemble under the bridge.”

Speer moves a white pawn on the board forward and checks his watch again. “Four seventeen—the enemy may suspect something, they send troops to the main gates.” With this, Speer reaches down and advances a black castle. “The second

wave will now move to the north of the town, blocking escape.” He looks up from his watch, “Where is Amelia?”

“Lyla Vogel has taken her on a tour of Berlin,” says Franz.

“Good,” says Speer. “She should see Berlin. It is a beautiful city. Everyone should see Berlin before they die.”

Speer advances a white bishop across the board. “Four eighteen—the signal will be given for twenty men to flank the sentries on the west side. They will conceal themselves behind the perimeter wall.”

Speer moves a black castle across the board.

Franz pictures a distant army, its soldiers in motion.

Speer turns from the chessboard.

“Lyla Vogel is quite the tour guide, I imagine, Franz,” says Speer. “She is a beautiful girl and impeccably loyal. You know, Franz, she left Bavaria and joined the *Jungmädels* here in Berlin before the war? She was not coerced into the party. She simply knew the people’s spirit would prosper. I’m sure Lyla Vogel will take good care of Amelia, whatever the outcome of this game.”

Speer’s game has developed into a complex position that Franz recognizes. Both sides risk loss, and it is a difficult play to escape from. The solution for white is to sacrifice the Queen.

“What do you make of this position, Franz?” asks Speer. “It is an interesting chess position, no doubt. Perhaps you recognize it?”

Franz looks closely at the board.

“It is a difficult position,” says Franz. “The solution is to sacrifice the Queen”.

“Ha! Again, your Eastern European obsession with self-flagellation!” says Speer. “But there is another way to win this battle, can’t you see it?”

Franz looks more closely at the board.

“Can you not see the alternative move?” asks Speer, leaning close to Franz’s ear and whispering with hot breath, “Can you not see it?”

Franz looks for an alternative play—one that might save the Queen from sacrifice.

“The answer, Franz, is to advance this pawn.”

Speer moves a pawn one space from the other side of the board into the final square.

“Therefore making the pawn a Queen,” Speer says. “It is a transformation from one thing to another: The pawn has the ability to shape-shift into any other thing at will. But only once it has crossed the board. The pawn, now transformed takes the enemy King.”

“Checkmate!” shouts Speer, banging his fist down on the board with a ferocious grin. “The pawn, the *lowliest* of pieces, has won the game.”

The apartment doors open and two SS men walk in, followed by Goebbels. He stands in the doorway, as if charged with electricity. He explores the room with two little pinprick eyes.

“Franz,” he says. “We have a field report radioed in from the Eastern Front.”

The two SS Men march over to Franz and flank him on both sides. A terror grips Franz. Goebbels walks closer, wringing his gloved hands. The wet leather squeals and melted snow drips onto the floor.

“Franz,” Goebbels says, his breath hot and smoky. “Did you hear me? We have word from the eastern front. The men followed your simulation. They have made their attack.”

“Herr Goebbels,” says Speer, his head hung, “the calibration of the machine may not have been sufficient—”

“Silence,” says Goebbels.

Goebbels then roars with laughter.

“The prediction was *perfect*,” says Goebbels. “The town is won. The advance was as the simulation suggested. We blocked the retreat from the North.”

Speer claps his hands, as if applauding some great show, and walks to embrace Goebbels.

“As I always said, Herr Goebbels. Our simulations were so close to running accurately.”

“Don’t touch me, Speer,” says Goebbels.

Goebbels gestures to the guards. One of them holds up an arm to stop Speer’s approach. Speer looks puzzled by the Minister’s behavior. Goebbels turns back to Franz, ignoring the architect.

“Franz,” says Goebbels, “I’m impressed by the accuracy of

this simulation. Now, the Führer asks that you work to compile data on future operations. I will have this week's operational movements sent to you for analysis by the machines."

"Herr Goebbels," says Speer, stepping forward. "This is fantastic. Just the news the strategy team was hoping for. We have worked so long on the simulation machines, it will be a pleasure to include Franz in my engineering team."

"Speer," says Goebbels, slowly pulling his gloves off, finger by finger. "Franz will not be joining your engineering team."

Goebbels lets the empty gloves fall to the floor. An SS man swiftly picks them up.

"Franz will be *running* the engineering team."

Speer walks unsteadily to the windows.

"Hitler and I have decided that your talents are better spent elsewhere, Speer. Colonnades and facades are valuable to the Reich and that is your gift to the German people. Franz will work on the strategy machines, and you will find your natural place among the pencils and other pretty things."

Speer grips the windowsill to steady himself. His breath falls on the cold glass and condensation obscures the view.

"The pencils?" Speer says softly, as if woken up from some terrible dream.

"You are an architect, Speer," says Goebbels. "The strategy room was no place for you. We should just as soon have a plumber running the Ministry of Propaganda. We each must

find our natural place.”

“Our natural place?” says Speer. “Yes, of course Herr Goebbels. I must find my natural place. And how did you, Herr Goebbels, find your natural place. You were a writer I believe? A novelist. Although, I do not recall the work. Would you, Herr Goebbels not be more comfortable among the books and pens of the library?”

Goebbels walks over to the chessboard.

“Some of us metamorphose into our natural place,” says Goebbels, gazing down at the game.

He picks up the pawn.

“This pawn seems, like me, to have done rather well for itself,” says Goebbels.

Goebbels walks across the room, and pushes the pawn hard into Speer’s forehead. Speer does not retreat, and so Goebbels runs the pawn’s bulbous wooden tip down Speer’s face, leaving a thin red mark on Speer’s skin. Then he drops the pawn into the architect’s breast pocket and taps the fabric.

“There, you see Speer? You can remind yourself of this lesson. The lesson of how even the lowly novelist, Joseph Goebbels, can become Minister in the most powerful nation the world has ever seen.”

Speer rests his hand on his pocket, feeling the shape of the small wooden piece against his chest.

“Franz, I am also very much looking forward to my game with the Mechanical Man on Friday. The people will be

impressed and surprised.”

Goebbels walks over to the Mechanical Man, circling it slowly.

Goebbels looks close into the Mechanical Man’s eyes. Franz has the strangest feeling the Mechanical Man might suddenly leap out of its seat. Its eyes are alive in the evening light, glistening with thought. Goebbels sees it too, and they both gaze unblinking at each other. Franz sees—or does he imagine?—the Mechanical Man twitch forward. Goebbels takes a step back.

“Excellent,” Goebbels says, brushing his jacket. “I feel this machine is in a fighting mood.”

•

Franz sits on a bench outside the University. The snowstorm has cleared. A bright afternoon light is cast across Berlin. It is the sort of afternoon where war seems impossible—implausible. The sun is warm on Franz’s face and for a moment he feels calm. Schwartz had urged Franz to come out here so that they might find a sandwich or tea in one of the small cafés.

They had no such luck, but the two men found an unexpected peace on this bench in the cold air.

All of Berlin gives the impression of having survived a terrible fever and now, awakening, the people exchange glances with each other in a wordless understanding.

Schwartz lights a cigarette, lifts it to his lips and emits a rough cough.

“Germany was not built on an empty stomach, and it will not continue on one.” He gestures down the street. “These wretched cafés, they close at the sniff of inconvenience. A nation must be strong in the face of danger. And what danger? A few bombs from the sky.”

Heinrich taps his feet and licks his lips.

“Wretched. Utterly wretched. Tell me, Franz, what do you think of Berlin? She is a magnificent city?”

Franz stands and looks down the street. It is hard to imagine that it all began here, in a room in this city. Was it at a desk, or in some basement that the idea began, took root and spread. Like a drop of dark ink in a glass of water—it’s bleak tendrils extending and diffusing. Somewhere here it began.

The thought is interrupted by the honk of a car horn. A black car stands at the curb. The door swings open and Amelia emerges, running over to Franz and wrapping her arms around him. Lyla follows, beaming.

“Such a lovely outing,” says Lyla. “I expect Amelia is quite exhausted from it all. Take her inside, Schwartz.”

“Come on,” says Schwartz, ushering Amelia into the apartment building.

Lyla sits on the bench and gestures at Franz that he should join her. Franz sits on the bench. The wood is damp from the snowfall, but Lyla seems not to care in the slightest.

“Do you have a cigarette?” she asks.

“Schwartz has cigarettes,” says Franz.

“I cannot stand that man. Can you?”

“He is the least thing I cannot stand here.”

“But he is especially frustrating. His constant eating is quite disgusting. Has he not had enough? I suppose, Franz, by your expression that you think in is in the national character to be as he is. Is all Germany like Schwartz? You think we are a huge mouth, gobbling down Europe with a furious greed? Is that what you think? I feel it is what you think.”

She stares at him fiercely, examining him, then sighs and goes on. “Perhaps you are right, perhaps we are a greedy people, but we were so very *hungry* not long ago—now the people can eat, so they feast. Once the feast is done, they will rest.”

“You never told me why you are here,” say Franz.

“Here in Berlin?” Lyla laughs. “Goodness, Franz. I am here because Germany is the body of the modern world, and Berlin is its heart. I have the right spirit. Joseph says so. The *Minister himself* says so. And we are all part of the Empire. The people love my films. Attend the cinema tomorrow at three and you’ll

see the line stretch all the way.”

Franz says nothing.

“Bavaria is a very beautiful place,” she continues. “Have you been there, Franz? No, I suppose not. The war has been very difficult for me, the constant restrictions. The pandemic of Jewish disease. Did you know they have closed the swimming baths?”

Franz feels a fury build in him. He cannot contain it.

“Closed the swimming baths? In Prague they have taken children to camps. Families have vanished overnight. And you have been inconvenienced because the swimming baths are closed?”

“Franz, you may recall the other evening that Berlin was bombed from the air. Do you recall? I am sorry for the troubles of Prague, but war is never beautiful. It is cold and desperate and terrible. But whatever troubles we face today will be worthwhile in the future. The Führer fights for us all. Even you. Though you show no gratitude.”

“Do you really believe these things?” Franz asks. “You sound like Goebbels. But he believes what he says. I don’t believe you do.”

Lyla snaps open a lipstick and closes her lips tightly.

“A Czech in Berlin would be wise to keep such opinions to himself,” she says, daubing a red glaze across her mouth. “How could you doubt my politics? There are men in the Ministry who have less evidence of their commitment to the Reich than

I do. There is nobody more committed to Joseph's work than I am.”

“*Joseph's* work.”

“Yes. Why do you say it like that? As if I am some silly little girl who has become infatuated.”

“Does he love you?”

“He *needs* me. Joseph has many responsibilities to the Reich. His commitment to me may not be obvious to you, as a stranger, but do not be confused.”

“And his wife? You have noticed he has a wife?”

“Oh does he? A wife? Yes, it has not escaped my notice. Of course he must maintain a certain image for the sake of the people. They would not understand the complexities of Joseph's life. He is not like them, with their petty conventions. You must know how complicated life can get. Where there are public obligations, there must be private secrets. Amelia, for example. I think she is rather complex. Am I right?”

“What do you mean?” asks Franz.

“Where was her mother from?”

Franz stares at Lyla. A horror rises inside him.

“Of course, I am imagining it,” Lyla says, brightening. “But consider it, Franz. *Imagine it*. What a story! A half-Jewish child socializing among the very highest ranks of Berlin society. It would be quite the scandal and people would ask, of course, why did nobody see it? Joseph is busy with many things, and he likes your machine and the attention it brings to him. I see

no reason to trouble him now. But it is intriguing, is it not, Franz, that Amelia has such an interesting face? Her mother must have been entranced by her. Perhaps she lit a candle in the synagogue for the birth. Did she?”

Franz begins to stand up.

Lyla puts her hand on Franz's shoulder, stopping him.

“I would like you to do something for me, Franz. It is a small thing, and will permit me to quite forget any silly thoughts I have about Amelia.”

“What do you want?” asks Franz.

“I need you to check something. On the floor above your apartments at the hotel, Joseph has private rooms that he keeps for guests and study. Now, it is a ridiculous thing, I know, but I will ask it anyway. I should like you to listen for any sound above—and if you should hear anything, quietly climb the stairs in secrecy and report to me what you witness.”

“You suspect Goebbels of something?”

Lyla touches her head lightly, as if to check she is still there.

“No. No. It is simply to put things in a state of certainty. It is my failing, not Joseph's. And Franz, speak to nobody of this bargain.”

Lyla stands up from the bench, her thick coat flailing about her in the wind. She walks across to the waiting car. It swallows her up and vanishes into the city.

Franz feels the wet wood of the bench soaking through to his skin. The sun has crept to the tip of the rooftops and a

golden light floods the square. His heart races from Lyla's words.

But the reality is that this does not matter. If Lyla speaks the right words to the right people in the party, an investigation will be launched and the consequences unthinkable.

Franz stands up from the bench. The sun has dipped below the rooftops and there is a light wind.

A boy carries a basket of bread across the square, tipping his hat at Franz. Franz nods back and walks back through the snow, up the steps to the hotel where he finds Amelia asleep, her head on the chessboard, facing the Mechanical Man. Franz lifts her gently and carries her to bed.

He returns to the Mechanical Man and begins to make adjustments for the battle simulation that will be run tomorrow.

•

Amelia sits on the end of the bed, studying a problem on the chessboard. She woke an hour ago. There is no snow yet, but she feels cold and has wrapped the bedsheets around her shoulders. She catches sight of herself in the window glass and

thinks she looks rather like a wise prophet from a storybook, ready to hold audience with a magician or a sorcerer.

The problem on the chessboard is difficult. For a moment she thinks she has the answer, but then discovers there is no clear escape.

Amelia sighs and returns the pieces to their starting positions. She then looks up from the board; the hard little lines of concentration in her forehead un-crease. Amelia pulls the bed covers over her head and lies back on the bed. The door to the hotel room clicks open.

“Hello,” says Lyla, unwrapping Amelia from her wise-prophet cape. “I’ve come to ask you out for lunch, although I’m not sure we will be allowed to dress like this.”

“Why not?” asks Amelia. “This is how I always dress for dinner.”

“Really?” says Lyla. “Are you sure?”

“Yes,” says Amelia. “Quite sure.”

“Very well, you can’t be wrong I suppose,” says Lyla, pulling another sheet from the wardrobe and wrapping it around her own head. “Right then, let’s go for lunch.”

Lyla strides out of the bedroom. Amelia sits confused for a moment, then follows her. The pair walk down the large staircase to the front door of the apartments where an SS Officer stares at their costumes in confusion.

“We are going to lunch,” says Lyla. “Call us a car.”

“Fraülein Vogel?” asks the officer.

“Yes?”

“Very well,” says the officer and shouts out onto the street for a car to be drawn near. Lyla is just about to step out onto the street when Amelia tugs lightly on her hand.

“Perhaps we should leave our capes at home,” Amelia says.

“Nonsense!” says Lyla. “We shall be cold without our capes, and you did insist.”

Amelia laughs at Lyla's apparent sincerity. She laughs out into the cold Berlin air and Amelia realises that for the first time in months — or has it been longer? — in what feels like *The First Time In Forever* she is, for the briefest of moments, happy.

Amelia drops lets the bed sheet slide off her head and drop to the floor. Lyla looks down at Amelia and then pulls her own bed sheet to the floor. They both step out of their ghostly puddles of bed sheets. Lyla takes Amelia's hand and they walk through the snow and into the waiting car.

The drive is long. Amelia wipes her hand across the frost on the car window and looks out. The landscape has changed. No longer the streets and tall brick buildings of Berlin, but bare trees and fields. The car turns through a gateway and down a long, featureless road.

“Where are we?” Amelia asks.

“I told you,” says Lyla. “We're going for lunch.”

“There's no lunch here,” says Amelia, a little sadly. “Just snow.”

A shadow grows across the horizon. It seems to be a huge building, like a railway station or a cathedral, except bigger than both. Amelia's mouth drops open and she clings tightly to Lyla's hand.

"What's that?" Amelia asks.

"It's a hangar," says Lyla. "It's where they keep aircraft."

"Are we going on a plane?"

"You'll see," says Lyla.

The car stops by the hangar and a man dressed in a pilot's uniform runs over to them, opening the car doors.

"Good afternoon, Lyla Vogel. And you must be Amelia?" says the man.

Amelia feels incredibly grand.

"Yes. How do you do?" says Amelia.

Lyla smiles.

"Lyla, I'm not sure that we have you on the roster," the man says.

"Sebastian," says Lyla kissing him on both cheeks, "a table for two please."

"I want to oblige, but Herr Goebbels says—"

"Oh, don't worry about anything," says Lyla.

"I fear that the seating plan will not permit more guests, says Sebastian, taking off his pilot's cap and placing it neatly on Amelia's head. "You must be hungry in this cold. It's no weather for girls. Come and I'll have you taken to a wonderful restaurant."

“We are to eat up there, in the air,” says Lyla, pointing to the sky.

“You are not on the roster.”

“Don’t be ridiculous, Sebastian. We will eat with the other guests onboard.”

Lyla walks around the pilot, towards the hangar. Amelia follows. The pilot walks beside them nervously.

“Lyla, I’m not sure you understand. There are already guests on board. I must adhere to the roster.”

The pilot’s hat, much too large for Amelia, tilts ridiculously on her head. She considers taking it off, but it feels rather a privilege to be wearing a pilot’s hat, so she lets it list.

“Are you refusing entry to me?” asks Lyla.

The pilot grimaces, takes the hat off Amelia’s head and places it back on his own.

“Open the doors!” he shouts.

The giant hangar doors slide open and Amelia glimpses the tip of a huge shape hiding in the building. As the doors open further, the tip gets taller and broader, expanding to fill every inch of her vision. Inside is a massive structure of fabric and steel, towering above them and stretching deep into the hangar.

It reminds Amelia of an illustration in her biology book. In the book there is a picture of a blue whale, and next to it, a tiny man, not much bigger than one of the whale’s eyes. This illustration let the reader compare the size of the blue whale to

the size of a human. Looking up at the enormous balloon that fills the hangar, Amelia feels like that tiny illustrated man stood next to the blue whale.

“The Zeppelin,” says the pilot. “Two hundred and fifteen tonnes of steel and fabric, made weightless by the miracle of hydrogen. A marvel of German engineering. Journey time from New York to Tokyo? Take a guess, Amelia.”

Amelia can hardly speak.

“Journey time from New York to Tokyo?” says the pilot. “Three days!”

“You’re extremely lucky, Amelia. I expect Lyla explained, but very few people have travelled by Zeppelin. But today we have special guests from the government.”

Lyla makes a light wave with her hand, as if it were no bother at all.

“Today’s flight will last two hours, and we will circle the city.”

The pilot kneels down, his face level with Amelia’s.

“I’m sure you will be delighted to hear, Amelia, our airship chef, who has himself travelled around the entire world in this Zeppelin, will be serving a great number of impressive people. But none, I suspect, as impressive as you, Amelia.”

Amelia smiles and curtseys. “No, I suspect not.”

“All aboard!” shouts the pilot, ushering Amelia and Lyla up a small metal staircase leading into the Zeppelin. Standing in the entrance is Goebbels.

“I don’t recall inviting you here,” says Goebbels.

“I didn’t want to miss out on your birthday celebrations,” says Lyla.

“My wife is here. My children are here,” says Goebbels.

“And now,” says Lyla, “your mistress is here.”

“I just have to check on something I’ll be back in a moment,” says Goebbels.

Now aboard, Amelia is hardly able to contain her delight. She runs up a flight of stairs which, she discovers, open out into a large dining room surrounded by windows.

The room is full of men in suits and women in elegant dresses.

She walks over to one of the windows to look out. The Zeppelin begins moving slowly out of the hangar. Amelia looks down to see men pulling the airship along with ropes, dragging it out onto the airfield.

The crowd of men release their grip and the Zeppelin rises up into the sky. Amelia waves down at them, but they do not wave back, instead staring into the snow.

A small, familiar figure stands by a car. It is Goebbels.

“Isn’t that Herr Goebbels?” says Amelia.

“Yes,” says Lyla.

“Did he fall out?” asks Amelia.

“Yes, apparently, he fell out,” says Lyla.

Goebbels looks up at the zeppelin and waves.

The Zeppelin rises up higher and higher, moving north towards the centre of Berlin. She leans out of the open window, her long hair twisting and billowing in the wind.

“There, look!” says Lyla. “The Spree! And there! Look there Amelia! The Sportpalast.”

Amelia looks down at the Sportpalast. The building looks small from the Zeppelin. It seems a wonder that tomorrow evening she will be somewhere within it, concealed in the Mechanical Man.

“You look so very serious, Amelia,” Lyla says. “Don't worry, this craft is extremely safe. Sebastian has navigated it around the world – can you picture that? The entire world, by Zeppelin! How very grand. When the war is over, I shall take the journey myself.”

“Dinner is served,” announces the waiter, pulling two chairs out from the table.

Amelia and Lyla sit at the table and smile at each other in silence as the waiter unfolds their napkins. Amelia recognizes one of the older women, it is Goebbels' wife, Magda, surrounded by children. Two SS men sit beside them.

“Sit, sit! How very awful you all are,” Magda says, brushing the children into places around the table. She looks up and meets Lyla's eyes.

Magda wobbles for a moment, then she reaches for a nearby wine bottle and presses it to her lips, drinking half of it in a series of gulps.

“What a delightful surprise,” Magda says, letting the wine bottle fall to her feet. A waiter steps in quickly to pick it up. “You would think that up here, a thousand feet above Berlin, Lyla Vogel would find it hard to reach us. But, no. The gods have granted us the most wonderful blessing, and here you are, Lyla. It is most impressive.” Magda turns to a few men smoking in the corner. “The girl can fly!”

“I heard there was a party,” says Lyla. “So I thought I should see.”

“You heard there was a party? You *heard* did you? Well, of course there is a party. We are celebrating my husband’s birthday. Although he was clearly unable to make it, there is no reason not to drink to him.”

Magda pours herself another glass of wine and two glasses for the SS men beside her. She holds her glass high above her head. “To Joseph, and everyone he has touched.”

“To Joseph,” says Lyla.

“Well sit down, my girl,” says Magda.

Amelia and Lyla take a seat opposite Magda and her children. They all stare curiously at each other.

“Children, this is Lyla.”

“I don’t like her,” says Magda’s son.

Lyla unfolds a napkin into her lap, stroking it flat.

“He says he doesn’t like you,” says Magda.

“I appreciate your boy’s honesty,” says Lyla.

“He’s not mine, but he is honest,” says Magda, ruffling the

boy's hair. "His Uncle Joseph does so love him."

"I'm Amelia, pleased to meet you all," says Amelia.

"Amelia!" says Magda. "How lovely. Well, Amelia, meet my children: Helga, Hilde, Helmut, Holdine, Hedda and Heidrun."

Magda's children watch Amelia blankly across the table.

"Helga, Hiddle, Helma... Hegga? Heidi?" says Amelia.

"It really doesn't matter. I would forget their names myself if I didn't have to scream at the little bastards so often," says Magda.

The airship rises up through the clouds. A waiter serves steak and they begin to eat.

One of the SS men lights a cigarette.

"Helga would seize a revolver and shoot the unfaithful husband out of hand, or at least try to," Magda suddenly announces.

The guests stop eating and look to Lyla.

"I'm not sure I follow?" says Lyla.

"Oh, I was simply describing the character of my daughter, Helga. I was imagining her reaction if some future husband was to deceive her. I think Helga would seize a revolver and shoot him. I play this little game, you see, when introducing them. I think it's interesting to explain each child's temperament by their reaction to being deceived. We do, after all, discover who we really are when we are betrayed."

Amelia looks at Helga who has bunched her tiny hand into

the shape of a gun and is pointing it at Amelia.

“Bang! Now you’re dead.” says Helga.

“Hilde, on the other hand, would collapse altogether, sobbing and weeping, but would soon appear to be reconciled if her husband expressed remorse and swore to be faithful in the future.”

“I would shoot him too,” says Hilde.

“Don’t say that just to be like your sister, Hilde. You have no appetite for blood.”

“*I would,*” says Hilde, folding her arms. “I would shoot him.”

“Helmut,” says Magda, taking the boy’s hand, “He would never believe that his wife would deceive him.”

“She wouldn’t,” says Helmut. “And if she did I would kill her. I would tear her arms off first. Then I would cook her. For days.”

Magda takes the hand of another daughter, “Hedda here would give a peal of laughter and say to her husband, ‘Come here you rascal and give me a kiss’”

“Would I?” asks Hedda.

“Yes, you would,” says Magda. “And Holde, well she would never quite get over the infidelity, but would be too proud to reproach her husband. Then, finally, through the breach of confidence on the part of her husband she would go to pieces altogether.”

“I would fall to pieces?” says Holde, in a small terrified

voice.

“Yes,” says Magda, “I’m afraid so. You would have some kind of breakdown, I imagine. Then most likely a suicide. I have to be honest, Holde.”

“And what would you do mother?” asks Helga. “Would you shoot Papi?”

“Of course not!” says Magda, cutting through the tough steak with her knife. “Obviously I will never find out what I would do, as I have never been betrayed, but I believe my gun would turn not towards your father, but in another direction entirely. I would remove the distraction.”

“I would do the same,” says Helga, narrowing her eyes.

“Well, this all feels a little morbid,” says Lyla.

“Ah!” says Magda, “Let’s lighten the mood. We must take a tour of the ship!”

“Should we eat desert first at least?” asks Lyla.

“No, no. I insist. A tour would be delightful and allow this first course to settle.”

Magda gets to her feet and walks unsteadily towards the the cockpit. She bangs loudly on the door.

“Pilot, pilot! We should like a tour.”

The pilot emerges from the cockpit and adjusts his hat.

“Yes, of course, a tour.”

He leads them to a hatch in the ceiling of the cabin and removes a panel. Cool air rushes in.

“Here, look, you can see the metalwork that makes up the

ship. Impressive workmanship.”

“Let’s go up there,” says Magda.

The pilot laughs. “It’s time for desert I think.”

“Let’s go up.”

The pilot turns nervous. “No, really I can’t allow that.”

“Nonsense! Can’t allow a little adventure? We are in need of adventure, pilot. And you will provide it.”

Magda pushes him aside and pulls herself up through the hatch in the ceiling. She climbs onto the roof of the cabin.

Hilde begins crying.

“Mutti?” says Helmut.

“Please, Fräulein, it’s very dangerous,” says the pilot.

Magda pokes her head back down through the hatch. “This air is so fresh! So fresh! I really needed this. It’s like a health spa up here. I can feel the wrinkles being smoothed away from my skin. It’s an adventure. Pass me my wine.”

The pilot tries to pull himself up through the hatch, but Magda pushes him back down.

“Not you, pilot. Her,” Magda says, pointing at Lyla.

“I’m not going up there,” says Lyla.

“Perhaps someone should go up there and help Fräulein Goebbels” whispers the pilot. “Perhaps you could calm her and bring her down?”

“Yes, Lyla, perhaps you could calm me,” says Magda cheerfully. “Come up. Bring the wine.”

Hilde's crying turns to a loud wailing.

"Oh, very well," says Lyla.

The pilot helps Lyla up through the hatch. She finds herself stood on top of the cabin. On either side are sheer drops into the sky, and far, far below that, the tiny streets of Berlin. Magda is sat on the edge, her feet dangling into space. She is crying.

"Oh Lyla, I have no appetite for this. I think I shall jump."

Lyla holds tightly onto an aluminum beam. A strong wind blows Magda's dress all around her in a fury.

"Come back inside, Magda. Your children!" says Lyla.
"Come in."

"They won't miss me much. I don't suppose my husband will either. You'll look after him, won't you Lyla? You'll take care of him?"

"Come inside, Magda, please. You're scaring me"

"Goodbye, Lyla. Tell my children goodbye too."

Magda raises her hands above her head, as if to dive into a swimming pool.

"No, Magda, stop!"

Lyla runs over to stop Magda from jumping.

Magda turns and grabs Lyla's wrist, twisting it cruelly.

"You thought I'd give up my husband?" she says.

Magda stands now, pushing Lyla to the decking.

"You flew up here, Lyla. I wonder if you can fly down? Can

you fly down there, like a little bird on your little actress wings?”

Magda pushes Lyla further off the edge of the cabin roof. She is strong and wild.

The wind is loud and brutal. Lyla feels herself slipping off into space. Then there is a smashing sound and Magda slumps down onto Lyla’s chest, unconscious.

Lyla crawls back onto the safety of the decking.

“I brought the wine,” says Amelia, standing with the neck of the broken bottle in her hand.

Lyla stands up.

“Help me with her, Amelia” she says.

They drag Magda towards the hatch.

“She’s drunk too much,” Lyla shouts down to the pilot. “She’s fallen asleep.”

They lower Magda down into the cabin and the pilot feels her pulse.

“Blood?” he asks, showing his hand red with blood.

“She fell hard on her head,” Lyla says.

“She needs rest, and water. We’ll make our descent.”

Lyla sits in silence with Amelia.

Magda’s children look across the cabin at them, unblinking. Very slowly, the Zeppelin descends through the clouds.



Franz sits in the apartment surrounded by the Mechanical Man's parts.

Franz returns to the component he is working on, adjusting the lathe to resurface a cog. He carefully spins up the lathe and edges the blade across the surface of the metal. A thin metal thread spirals away from the bit. The surface of the spindle becomes clean and shiny—a layer of its old face cast away, revealing a new unsullied metal.

Goebbels strides into the room.

“The machine is prepared for tomorrow's match?” he asks.

“Yes.”

“Very good. I am excited to see the improvements you have made to the machine's game. Certainly it will need every advantage it can muster.”

Goebbels walks over to the rows of computers and strikes one hard on the side. The nearby engineers wince.

“A remarkable thing, this IBM computer,” says Goebbels, “Do you imagine that the British have anything like this? No, no of course not. They are pigs.”

Goebbels makes an odd snorting sound.

“Piggy wiggies.”

Franz turns back to the lathe and begins making an

adjustment to the blade.

“Franz,” says Goebbels. “Do I sense an attraction between you and Lyla Vogel? I sometimes have such a vivid imagination, and I like clarity in my work. Fräulein Vogel is property of the Reich.”

Franz turns to face Goebbels.

“No, it was a ridiculous notion. Not worth mentioning,” says Goebbels. “The penalty is obvious to anyone, and a man as intelligent as yourself would not take such a risk.”

Goebbels reaches quickly and switches on the lathe and the machine burst to life, throwing its metal chuck key into the ceiling at high speed. Franz jumps back and switches off the lathe.

“We must be careful around dangerous machinery,” says Goebbels. “Safety first.”

•

Lyla sits alone in her apartment watching the searchlights scan the clouds over Berlin. Her fingers clasp the small metal bird on the chain around her neck. She wraps her hand around the jeweled creature.



It is the day of the chess match in the Sportspalast. Goebbels stands in his dressing room backstage with a tailor, facing a large mirror. The morning light fills the room. Goebbels pulls himself up proudly, puffing his chest. He turns to the side and buttons his shirt cuffs. He then slips on a jacket.

“It doesn't fit properly. Who made this scheiße?” says Goebbels.

“Herr Boss made it,” says the tailor. “I think it is a good fit, but may take some time to wear in.”

“Herr Boss? Well you can tell Hugo that he will lose our business if he keeps on this dismal track.”

“Herr Goebbels, Hugo Boss has done such lovely work with all our other Nazi uniforms.” The tailor gestures to nearby SS officers. “It is beautiful work, see.” The tailor runs his finger across the skull and crossbones on an SS officer's hat. “Hugo Boss is a wonderful designer. His reputation will endure for centuries, I'm sure. With a few adjustments, your new suit will meet the same level of—“

Goebbels throws the jacket to the floor and reaches for a cane, raising it to strike the tailor, but there is a brisk knock on the dressing room door.

“Enter,” Goebbels says.

The stage manager walks into the room.

“Herr Goebbels, they are ready for you in the auditorium.”

“Very good,” says Goebbels, sitting down in a chair.

The stage manager waits patiently.

“Herr Goebbels, I do not mean to be impertinent. The crowd are waiting.”

“Then they will wait more,” snaps Goebbels. “You do not feed a hungry crowd until they are starving.”

“Yes, Herr Goebbels,” says the stage manager.

Goebbels sits in silence. His right leg resting in mute betrayal.

“Herr Goebbels, could I fetch you the doctor?” asks the stage manager.

Goebbels looks up.

“Oh, I shouldn’t,” says Goebbels.

“But you do so love your medicine, Herr Goebbels. It is so very refreshing for you each day. Is it not?” says the stage manager.

Goebbels head feels heavy and unclear.

“I can’t deny that a refreshment might do me good,” Goebbels says quietly.

The doctor is ushered in and reaches into his bag for a small glass vial of amphetamines and a syringe. He sticks the syringe into the vial, carefully withdrawing a measured amount. He

pulls it out then flicks the syringe. He rolls up Goebbels' sleeve and jabs the needle quickly into the flesh, dispensing the medicine. A bright spark travels through Goebbels' body, setting it gloriously alight. He stands, the pain in his leg gone. The world shining like steel.

“The game is begun,” says Goebbels, picking up the cane and smacking it against the floor.

“I,” Goebbels says, smacking the cane.

“Am.” Smack.

“God!”

With this, he strides past the doctor, down a warren of corridors into the bright spotlights of the stage at the Sportpalast. A blinding white infinity absorbs him completely, before forming the shapes of men and women, hundreds of them, on their feet, clapping and cheering. For him. For Joseph Goebbels.

•

Amelia hears a loud cheer and peeks through the small gap in the side of the Mechanical Man. She sees that the crowd is on their feet, clapping, roaring and stamping. She finds her hands shaking and she clasps them together.

The air in the box is hot and stuffy, the bright spotlights of

the stage beat on the Mechanical Man and make the controls slippery to the touch. She looks up through the chessboard above. The glass is covered in a thin layer of condensation, the tiny droplets making it hard to see through. Amelia wipes her hand across the glass, clearing a patch through which she can examine the board.

Her legs feel cramped and they ache after a night hidden in the Mechanical Man. She longs to stretch them out. This action that once seemed so insignificant to her would now be the greatest delight imaginable. Amelia looks again through the small gap in the box and then she spots him, her father. He stands at the side of the auditorium, flanked by SS guards. She can see he is looking through a chess book, nervously leafing through the pages and glancing up now and again at the stage.

The applause stops and Amelia hears Goebbels' voice, loud and booming, amplified across the Sportsplatz.

•

“My citizens of Berlin, children of the Reich, we are here to celebrate the expansion of our Empire and our victories over Europe. The nation grows ever stronger and...”

Goebbels throws his arms open.

“...and we are fiercer, more intelligent and focused than ever.”

Applause erupts across the Sportpalast and Goebbels feels himself swell with joy. The medicine has reached its peak and his connection with the audience seems intimate, as if they are all part of him and not a vast sea of faces.

Goebbels smiles across the auditorium, taking it all in, his delight barely contained. The air feels electric. Thousands stare up at him. *Who?* He can't tell. The lighting is impossible, he cannot properly see the crowd, but he acts as if he recognizes faces, staring out into the dazzling abyss of the auditorium and catching the eye of imaginary guests—of everybody. Goebbels grins at ghosts.

“Please, please. Enough,” says Goebbels. “Enough!” he says, stamping his foot.

The crowd fall quiet.

“Now is the time for a new normal,” says Goebbels. “It is the time for total German new... domination... war?” Goebbels loses his train of thought. “Yes we can!” he says suddenly and uncertainly. Then, with complete confidence he shouts, “We are stronger together.” Then Goebbels stumbles, his wretched foot refusing to function properly. “Domination, Domination... War!” Goebbels shouts meaninglessly.

The crowd cheers at this.

“You have been very patient. Berlin has been very patient,”

Goebbels tells the crowd. “The war is a great struggle, but a struggle that our children will remember and their children too. And tonight is a night for war; a night for battle, an intellectual battle. The Reich has overseen some astounding developments in technology and tonight I wish to show you one of these achievements. Tonight I will demonstrate the awesome power of the Reich’s newest computing device. Tonight, I shall play this Mechanical Man at a game of chess. It is the beginning of a new age. The age of electronic computers. Already we are in partnership with IBM. The Nazi era is upon us, powered by IBM. Domination. Control. Power. Glory. Glory! Domination! Total war control! Power war control... war?”

The crowd are silent.

Goebbels shouts and stamps his foot, “War war war!”

The crowd cheer again.

“I give you The Mechanical Man,” says Goebbels. “A fully-automated man who is able to play chess.”

The crowd cheers.

“I shall play this Mechanical Man at a game of chess and you, my fine citizens of Berlin, will witness the astonishing potential of the new computer age. But, of course,” adds Goebbels, smiling, “I will win.”

From inside The Mechanical Man, Amelia hears applause and, as it dies down, the slow click of Goebbels' boot-heels across the stage. She hears the chair opposite the Mechanical Man scrape back across the wooden stage floor, then Goebbels' face leans in, as if staring at her for a moment, and then the chair scrapes back.

Amelia watches Goebbels inspect the board. His long fingers explore the pieces, nudging them slightly this way and that. He must be dissatisfied with the board, thinks Amelia, as he's spending some time adjusting the pieces.

Goebbels pays particular attention to the knights, making certain that the horse's heads are pointed directly across the board. Amelia peers out through the gap in the side of the Mechanical Man. The crowd are perfectly silent, she can see hats and coats and fur and swastikas glinting. The audience appears to be leaning in, their eyes fixed intently on the little box on the stage, hundreds of them staring at her, and yet unaware that she is staring right back at them.

Amelia grips the wooden controller arms, her hands slick and wet. She runs her fingers along the coarse grips, feeling for the correct position on the machine's limbs. Amelia hears the crowd roar as Goebbels takes his seat; she can see him, blurred and magnified through the one-way glass of the chess board. His eyes spread and change as if distorted by circus mirrors.

A shadow falls across the board—it is cast by Goebbels' arm—and the crowd falls deathly silent. Amelia peers up through the glass, the shadow moves slowly, cautiously across the board. As Goebbels moves a chess piece on the board, he taps it on the glass.

Tap. Tap Tap.

He then looks straight down at Amelia, a look of curiosity. She winces.



Goebbels taps the knight on the glass of the board, decides to release it, and looks down at his own reflection. The crowd applaud fiercely, but Goebbels cannot hear them, for a hair has come loose from his coffered mound and he studies it in horror before pushing it slowly back into place.

For a moment he catches his own expression and is surprised, not recognizing himself for the look in his eyes. He is disgusted to find that he bears the expression he knows from his subordinates. It is the expression of a nervous man. Goebbels has seen the same look in soldiers when he has walked past them and given them a hard stare.

And there, he sees it, most appalling of all, above his right eyebrow, an uninvited guest, a perfectly round, sparkling bead of sweat. The bead of sweat makes a sudden crawl into the hair

of his eyebrow and Goebbels moves closer to the board to inspect it, he can barely contain his fury at his body's act of independence.

Suddenly aware of the silence across the Sportpalast, Goebbels stares up into the face of the Mechanical Man, fierce with outrage at the affront of this creature to make him feel this way. But his stare is met only by a statue. The mechanical man stares back at him unflinching—its eyes glistening; calm.

•

“Now, Mechanical Man,” says Goebbels, clapping his hands together sharply. “Move”. The Mechanical Man quickly reaches out and pushes forwards a pawn. The move is completed without hesitation and Goebbels shifts in his seat.

The crowd applaud and Goebbels nods slowly at them. Then, as if he has personally switched off each pair of clapping hands, the auditorium is quiet again. Goebbels studies the board. Its checkered surface seems to swim and confuse him. He adjusts his cuffs and slides his feet back against the chair legs.

Somewhere in the Sportpalast, high above Goebbels a man coughs; a deep cough that echoes across the auditorium. After minutes of examining the board, Goebbels makes his move.

Goebbels' piece touches the glass, his long fingers release it and the crowd clap politely. A second later the Mechanical

Man lifts his hand and makes a counter move. Goebbels can see that the speed of the counter attack is remarkable and ingenious, and the crowd clap furiously until Goebbels turns his head to them. Again, it is as if he has switched off the audience with his mind.

Silence.

Goebbels looks down at the board, studying the positions of the pieces. His leg feels restless and heavy, and a curious sensation overcomes him. The crowd, *his crowd*, feel unfamiliar and strange. He decides to rouse them. He will rouse them with a short speech and then return to the game.

Goebbels begins to give a short speech on the distribution of troops to the Eastern Front but, just as he is warming to the subject and forming a marvelous phrase, Goebbels hears the voice of a small boy whispering near the front of the stage.

“Papi, Papi!” the boy whispers. “Why is Herr Goebbels taking so much longer to make his move than the Mechanical Man?”

The boy is shushed by his father.

Goebbels stands quickly in anger, knocking his chair to the floor.

Thinking that this is a cue for Goebbels to begin another speech, the lighting engineer dims the house lighting and shines a bright spotlight on Goebbels.

Goebbels’ chair lies toppled on the floor behind him, dust specks glisten like tiny stars above him in the air.

On the stage, Goebbels' twisted face and clenched fists have turned him into a character in some absurd play. For a moment it is if the *Minister of Propaganda* is floating in space—alone in an infinite darkness.

Goebbels begins to speak, but a odd uncertainty shrouds him. The right words will not come and he steps back, attempting to find refuge in the shadows. But the spotlight follows him.

In fury he storms across the stage to bark commands at a stage hand, but again the spotlight follows him and an awkward self-consciousness overcomes him.

He paces quickly across the stage, attempting to dodge the spotlight, shaking his fist at the beam, but unable to see its source. A few scattered laughs erupt from the crowd.

He realizes that his protests make him seem weak, so Goebbels swings himself around and marches back to the table, sits down in the unbearable brightness of the spotlights and without thought, picks up a pawn and moves it forwards two squares. He sits back and waits.

Now, a second later, the Mechanical Man reaches forward with a glinting hand and quickly counters, moving a bishop. Goebbels shifts, feels the eyes of the crowd on him. Another pearl of sweat sparkles on the tip of his nose. A little voice in the front row begins again, “Papi, why is Herr Goe—“

“Let's play!” shouts Goebbels, plucking another pawn from the ranks and advancing it. The pawn has just touched the

board when the Mechanical Man lurches out an eager hand and makes another move—a hopeless, lunatic move. The Mechanical man's eyes glisten with a cold threat.

“Hah!” spits Goebbels, instantly capturing the Mechanical Man's knight.

But now the Mechanical Man counters even faster, moving a castle down the side of the board—perhaps calculating some move Goebbels cannot yet grasp.

Goebbels inspects the board, then waves his hand in dismissal and quickly moves a pawn forward. The Mechanical Man counters instantly.

Goebbels strikes again. Faster and faster the two men play—a spectacle of speed and wits. Soon just half the pieces remain and the pair are locked in concentrated battle.

The crowd in the Sportplast hushes, men unfold their glasses then strain their heads towards the stage. The cold air in the Sportpalast is filled with the eerie fog of a fourteen-thousand spectators breathing quietly into the chilly silence. Goebbels stands and paces around the board.

•

Amelia is drenched in sweat. Her little arms lay ragged by her sides and she peers up through the glass of the chessboard.

Goebbels has gone, but she can hear him pacing around the boards of the stage, no doubt figuring out if one move or another move is the solution to the game.

The damp cloth of Amelia's dress clings to her legs and makes her feel like some insect half-stuck in its cocoon. She turns her neck, damp with sweat, to peer out of the hole in the side of the machine. Hundreds of tiny faces peer back at her from the crowd, every now and then a shadow passes, then is gone, then returns.

Amelia imagines Goebbels pacing back and forwards on the stage, imagines his face. Is it smiling, or anxious? Was she too provocative, speeding through the game? She has a tactic, an idea about how she can win—it builds in her deep, like a wave far out to sea. Amelia spots Lyla in the crowd. Dressed in an elegant lace jacket and smiling.

Click. A piece on the board above her is placed down. Goebbels has resumed the game. Amelia examines the board and her eyes widen. Amelia can see the sequences open up in front of her—every move now leads to Goebbels losing the game.

Then, behind the pieces, Amelia sees that a face looms, Goebbels face, appearing to stare right down at her. She sees in his face the horror of a single realization:

He sees her.

Goebbels looks down at the board. His head spinning. Struggling to focus, he stands and takes a step towards the crowd. Their faces seem to turn on him. What is it he sees in their eyes. Is it doubt? No. How could they doubt Herr Goebbels? He turns again to the chess board but his eyes cannot focus. He is certain he saw the girl Amelia beneath the chessboard in the Mechanical Man. The horizon seems to shift unpredictably.

“I...” Goebbels says quietly into the Sportpalast. Words seem difficult now. So heavy.

A boy in the front row points at Goebbels and whispers something to the man next to him—his father—who nods his head and looks sadly at Goebbels.

“A Jew!” Goebbels hears himself shout. Then he points wildly into the audience. “A jew!” His finger tracing wildly across the faces. “We cannot proceed. There is a Jew among us. I cannot permit the match to proceed.”

He throws himself forward on his feet and stumbles off the stage.

“Herr Goebbels?” he hears a voice say. The thick arms of Schwartz steady him.

Goebbels whispers, “A Jew. I’m certain of it. I saw one. There in the crowd. Have the guards check everyone at the doors.”

“Herr Goebbels, all the guests were personally invited.

There really is no chance that— ”

“I cannot allow the match to continue. We must postpone until tomorrow. So that we may be certain of the audience.”

“Yes, Herr Goebbels. Of course.”

“Schwartz, the girl, Amelia. Where is she?”

“In the audience with her father.”

“You’re certain of this?”

Goebbels peers from behind the curtains of the auditorium. The audience is chattering wildly.

“Where, Schwartz? Do you see her?”

Schwartz looks out. He sees Amelia’s father. He stands alone, looking out at the stage in terror.

“Drop the curtains,” shouts Goebbels.

Curtains fall across the stage.

“Come with me, Schwartz.”

Goebbels climbs up a ladder into the roof of the Sportpalast. From here they can see down onto the stage, where the Mechanical Man sits.

“Now,” says Goebbels, “we wait.”

Darkness falls across the Sportpalast. Tiny lanterns are switched off one by one until just one burns by the mechanical man. Schwartz is nudged awake by Goebbels.

“Look, Schwartz, look!”

A figure crosses the stage far below, a long shadow that walks over to the Mechanical Man. A sharp click rings out and

a door opens in the side of the machine.

Goebbels' face seems to collapse, as if the strings holding it up have been cut.

Another shadow joins the first shadow. The shadows embrace and Schwartz's breath stops for a moment. One shadow is the inventor, the other is his little girl, Amelia.

"And so you see, Schwartz," says Goebbels, "there really is no magic."

"Herr Goebbels I—"

"Schwartz, you are sworn to secrecy under order of the Reich. You will tell no one of what you have seen here this evening. You will follow my instructions. You will take two men and you will find the little girl, Amelia. You will take Amelia to somewhere quiet, somewhere nobody will see you, and you will do the Reich a great honor."

"But Herr Goebbels, she is a child."

"We were all children. What is a child? Just a tiny soldier. She is a war criminal. There are no children who act as aggressors against the Reich. Our enemies have no excuse in age, and they come to us in all disguises."

"Herr Goebbels—"

"Schwartz, should I cut your face off? Or are you going to follow Germany's orders? But, of course, you must not kill the girl yet. We need her to play inside her puppet-man tomorrow but we do not want her to play well. I suggest we inhibit her style. Just enough. Perhaps snap her arms? Yes, I think her

arms.”

Schwartz steadies himself on the handrail. Sweat clings to him.

“Her arms?”

“Yes, her arms. Such fragile, tender little things. And I so often find that it is the most fragile things that are so easily prone to snap. Often all it takes is the slightest amount of pressure, applied in the correct way. I know you have taken a liking to the girl, Schwartz. Perhaps I should ask an officer who will be less careful in how the operation is performed?”

Schwartz’s lips part softly and in a very quiet, sad voice he says, “Yes, Herr Goebbels. Her arms.”

“Break them,” says Goebbels.

“Yes, Herr Goebbels.”

“Schwartz, The night folds her trembling hands over a weary world. And out of a pale blue, rises the shining moon. My thoughts are flying to the stars like lonely swans.”

“What?” says Schwartz.

“Just something I wrote once,” says Goebbels, adjusting the little metal swastika on his jacket. “I once intended to be an author of books. How pathetic the authors of books seems to me now. A lucky escape.”

“A lucky escape,” says Schwartz.

“Do you like this jacket by the way?” asks Goebbels. “It’s Hugo Boss.”

“Yes, very good, Herr Goebbels.

“We shall resume the match tomorrow evening then, Schwartz. I wish you good evening.”

Goebbels hooks his legs over the railings in a quick, reptilian movement and climbs quickly down the ladder. Schwartz watches as Goebbels gets smaller and smaller, before he hops gracelessly off the ladder and exits the stage. Schwartz reaches into a jacket pocket for the remains of his cheese sandwich, but finds only crumbs.

•

Amelia sits in the window of the apartments, looking out over Hasenheide park. From here she can see three men huddled together under a streetlamp. One of them points towards the apartments, up at Amelia, and the others nod in agreement. Quickly they tread their way across the street, their feet leaving little marks in the snow.

She hears the door of the building open, a shout from the housekeeper downstairs and then the thick stamping of boots up the staircase. Keys jangle in the lock of her apartment door and it is pushed open. The three men now stand in the doorway, their scarves wrapped tightly across their faces. Only their eyes are visible. Their coats are speckled with snowflakes. Two of them look angry, but the other, his eyes look sad,

alone. The sad eyed man pushes the other two men forward.

Amelia stands up and faces them. She feels no fear. She walks towards the two approaching men. They stop and turn back to the man with sad eyes, as if to ask him whether they should continue. He looks down at the floor.

One man takes Amelia and pushes her down to the ground. Amelia shouts for help, but there is no answer. The other man picks up the large carriage clock on the mantelpiece above the fireplace and carries it over to Amelia. With huge effort he lifts the carriage clock high above his head, struggling to balance under the weight of it.

Quickly, and with his eyes wide and empty, he brings the huge clock down hard on Amelia's left arm, then her right. The crack of bones pierces the air and Amelia screams.



Lyla plays piano in the empty Ballhaus. Her fingers are still cold from the car journey back from the Sportspalast and the melody comes out slow and imperfect. She can hear Goebbels talking in the next room. Now and again she catches a word of conversation. It is the usual talk of war and empires. After a moment the door clicks open behind her and she is aware of hands on her shoulders.

“I think we should have it tuned,” Goebbels says.

“It was tuned last week,” Lyla says. Not turning around,

continuing to play—now faster. Her fingers warming to the air.

“Something is amiss though,” Goebbels says, running his hands down Lyla’s arms to her wrists. “The melody is uncontrolled. It must be the fault of the piano.”

“Perhaps it is uncontrolled,” says Lyla. “Perhaps there is beauty in things we cannot control. Perhaps you don’t like me playing an improvisation?”

“What is wrong with Bach, Beethoven, or Mozart, Lyla? To improvise like this is degenerate. Why must you always improvise? In order to understand National Socialism you should listen to Wagner.”

Goebbels picks up a pile of sheet music nearby and slams it onto the lid of the piano.

“Here, Lyla. Here is music. See? It’s written here. I enjoy things that can be predicted. The Reich is predictable. That is our strength.”

“Are you alarmed because you cannot control me,” asks Lyla.

“But, Lyla, I *do* control you. You think that I can command all the armies of the Reich and not control one woman playing piano in Berlin?”

“I thought it was the Führer that controlled all the armies of the Reich, Herr Goebbels.”

Goebbels slowly closes the piano lid.

“I discovered something very interesting this evening, Lyla.

Something that may fascinate you.”

Lyla opens the piano lid again and runs her fingers down the piano, playing quick, rhythmical, bass notes that she makes rise in scale across the piano in beautiful patterns.

“Lyla, I think what I have discovered will intrigue you very much indeed. In fact, it has a certain unpredictability. But it is this unpredictability that—like all things in the *new normal*—I have brought under control.”

“Everything cannot be controlled, Joseph. Who would want control in all things?”

She laughs and plays another run up the piano, her fingers dancing.

“I have uncovered a trick. A cheap magician’s trick,” continues Goebbels. “A trick designed to undermine the Reich. A trick designed to pour scorn on our dream of automation. And the trick has been performed by none other than a little girl.”

Lyla stops playing.

“Yes,” says Goebbels, extending a bony finger and placing it on the lowest note of the piano. “A little,” he says, pounding the bass note hard and angrily with each syllable. “A little, little, *little* girl.”

He slams the piano lid shut.

“I know the secret of the Mechanical Man, my sun-kissed buttercup,” Goebbels whispers. “And the secret is, there is a little girl inside him.”

Lyla feels hot tears escape down her face. Goebbels' lips press close to her ear, whispering.

“Of course, Lyla Vogel, you know *nothing* of this. And Berlin will know nothing of this. I hope you understand the consequences if you were to share this knowledge with anyone, Lyla?”

Goebbels begins to pace about the room.

“I can shape a very difficult world for you to live in if I need to, Lyla. I *shape* this place. It would not be impossible, for example, for me to prove with sufficient repetition, and a deep psychological understanding of the people concerned, that a square is in fact a circle. Our world is made up of words, and words can be molded. If you tell a lie long enough, it becomes the truth. I wonder what lies I might tell about you? What new truths I might shape for you.”

Goebbels adjusts his cufflinks.

“Tomorrow, the Mechanical Man will lose the match to me in the Sportpalast. Amelia has suffered some unfortunate wounds. She will not be the puppetmaster she once was. And so, after the match tomorrow, we will hear nothing of it again. Because should you remember more, then you will be very badly hurt. Do I make myself clear Lyla?”

Lyla nods, her body shaking.

“Good, good,” says Goebbels, wrapping his arms gently around her. “You trouble me so, Lyla. My little pigeon. And yet I love you. Why is that?”

“You don’t know *love*, Joseph.”

“I don’t know love? My love extends across all of Germany. My love is terrifying it is true. It’s not from your movies. Real love, you see Lyla, is to take a person, and to beat them senseless, for their own sake. *To kill them if needs be*. If it will help educate them. There is no greater love than that. This is true love. There is no purer kind of love than this.”

“It is *death* for me, to be *loved* by you.”

“Oh what drama. See the beautiful and boundless love of mine. You have everything you could need here. A place in society, an apartment to live in. What woman in Berlin would not die to have these things? And you say you are dead.”

“What use are all these things if love must be kept secret?”

“It is not a secret. I speak it freely in private with you. Who else would you have know? My wife? Do you want to ruin us?”

“I already feel ruined. Speer says all Nazi ruins will be beautiful. And I suppose that is how I will be. I am your beautiful ruins. Well, I don’t want to be your ruins.”

“Insolent girl. Must I shake you awake? Beat you into joyfulness?”

Lyla snatches the swastika from her shirt, ripping the fabric.

“This is yours, not mine,” she says.

“You’ve damaged your shirt,” Goebbels says.

“I can’t even feel you. It’s like— ” Lyla stares hard at Goebbels, realizing something, “You’re not here at all. You

think only your foot is diseased. But I think you're all diseased."

Goebbels storms across to the piano and opens the lid to the keys.

"Here, Lyla. Play your last song here. There are other, more beautiful, actresses in Berlin who are much less trouble than this. Tomorrow I will call for your apartments to be cleared, and you will return to Bavaria. Of course, your career may be harder than it has been, without a benefactor. But I wish you good luck. I trust that our conversation here will go no further."

He smashes his hand into the piano keys. A string snaps and the wood splinters.

"Do you understand me?" he shouts.

Lyla stands frozen in the middle of the parquet floor. Goebbels walks across to her and kisses her gently on the forehead.

"Goodbye," he says softly.

Goebbels strokes Lyla's cheek delicately, his fingers barely touching the skin, then he punches her hard across the face. Lyla falls to the floor, blood streaming.

"Oh, you've got blood on my shirt," says Goebbels sadly, looking down at himself. "Do you like this suit?"

Lyla lies motionless on the floor, blood running from her head.

"It's Hugo Boss," says Goebbels. "I don't like it. Not his

best work. The SS uniforms were excellent, but this is *trash*.”

•

Amelia winces in pain as her father bandages her arms.

“Two fractures,” he says. “Along the radius.”

“Who were the men?” asks Amelia.

“Did they say anything?”

“Nothing.”

“Then we can't know who they were. They cannot know about the Mechanical Man or we would both be dead. All we know is that you must play tomorrow, Amelia.”

“How can I play without my arms?”

Amelia feels her father's sadness. His eyes do not leave her arms and he works carefully to bandage and splint them.

“I will play,” says Amelia, lifting one arm.

The pain is unbearable, but does not let this show on her face. “I'll play, for us. And then we can go home?”

“Yes, then we can go home.”

“To Prague. To my room and your workshop.”

“To Prague, yes.”

He wraps the final turn of bandage and ties it tight on Amelia's forearm.

“Here, take this.”

He hands Amelia a small flask of vodka.

“Just take a sip now and again, for the pain. But you must not drink much or you will fall asleep. You must be awake for the match. Now, hurry, we must walk quickly to the Sportsplast. There's little time.”

Amelia stands, her arms feel like terrible weights hung from her shoulders. They step out into the snow and trudge hopelessly into the night.

“We will hide you in the Mechanical Man for the match tomorrow. You must keep quiet, they have guards on the machine during the day, but tonight there is only one guard. I will distract him and you will hide in the machine. Are you scared, Amelia?”

“Yes,” says Amelia.

“I will be there in the audience. I will be there from the morning. Do you trust me?”

“I trust you.”

•

Lyla stands alone in the Ballhaus, her face stained red with blood. She watches snow falling gently across the street, covering the buildings and streets in a white haze.

She closes the piano lid.

Then, without putting on a coat, Lyla walks down the staircase, through the front door and out into the midnight air. She keeps walking. There, between the snowflakes and street lamps, she knows what she must do.

•

Amelia climbs into the Mechanical Man, shuffling her body back into the small gap. Her arms are like logs in her lap. She finds that she can hardly reach the levers.

“Now, sleep,” says her father. “Sleep Amelia and dream of the game and it can be practice.”

“Father,” says Amelia, looking at the inventor.

The inventor closes the door to the Mechanical Man.

“Play well, Amelia”.

•

It is a bright clear morning in Berlin and the streets are all hats and scarves. Outside the Sportpalast a line stretches along the street. A boy selling penny apples dances to amuse the waiting crowd. Someone throws him a few coins, causing him to

scamper off into the park with a happy yelp.

Soon, the gates are opened and the river of hats and scarves pours into the Sportpalast, filling the arena. The afternoon quickly turns to dusk and spotlights illuminate the stage.

A light rain begins to fall outside. It feels as if the whole city is waiting in anticipation. From the tenements of Kreuzberg to the ornate hallways of Mitte, factory workers and lawyers turn to nearby clocks and their minds fill with excitement: Goebbels and the Mechanical Man are soon to appear.

The Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra strikes a daring chord and the stage lights get brighter. Goebbels strides on stage in a dazzling beam of light and a bright red suit. The violinists crescendo and Goebbels raises his arms above his head (coinciding perfectly with a cymbal crash) signalling a silence. Into this silence, addressing a thousand cold faces, he speaks.

“Good evening, ladies and gentlemen,” he begins. “I trust you are all as excited as I am to witness the conclusion of last night’s match. We have many friends here.”

Goebbels looks up at the boxes and sees his wife Magda, sat with their children. Then he looks down at the box below them, expecting to see Lyla. He finds this box empty and an unfamiliar sensation rises in his stomach.

“We have many friends here. And we have lost many friends. But we are the strongest we have ever been, and we can only get stronger. We live in a new age where machines and our government will usher in a new, more prosperous future.

And so, I give you what we have all been waiting for! The conclusion of the game.”

Goebbels raises his arms again and the timpani drums beat softly.

“Let’s play!”

The spotlights behind Goebbels switch on and the Mechanical Man is illuminated. The orchestra plays a dramatic flurry. Goebbels walks towards the Mechanical Man and takes a seat.

“Hello again, Amelia,” he says softly, looking down and tapping the glass of the board. Below him, in the board, he can see only darkness. “I see you’ve turned off your little light,” he whispers. “Well, I find the best way to play is in darkness. So let’s begin. My move, I believe.”

He reaches for the knight and makes a move. Then leans back in his chair and laces his fingers behind his head. “Now, your move.”

The Mechanical Man does not move.

“Your move,” Goebbels whispers.

The Mechanical Man shudders slightly, but still makes no move.

Goebbels sits and waits. Minutes pass.

“It seems,” Goebbels announces to the crowd, “that the Mechanical Man is resigning. I believe he has given up on the game.”

Hushed voices begin chattering across the Sportpalast.

Goebbels stands.

“Well, I believe the match is over. A little unspectacular, but many of the greatest victories are won quietly. Good evening to you all.”

Goebbels walks towards the edge of the stage, adjusting his sleeves and grinning wildly. But he has not reached the exit when he senses a change of mood in the crowd, a voice shouts out, another voice joins it. Then clapping; a cheer.

Goebbels turns to see the Mechanical Man has raised one arm in the air, holding a pawn.

“Oh,” says Goebbels, walking curiously back to the Mechanical Man, his smile fading. “We have a game.”

Goebbels studies the board. He makes another move and waits. Again, the Mechanical Man makes no move. It’s arm raises slightly, then drops again. It moves to the left, shudders, as if exhausted, and then the machine is still again.

“Are your arms a little weak?” Goebbels whispers. “Oh dear. Did you hurt your little mittens, Amelia? Are they hurty wurty?”

“Do we still have a game?” Goebbels asks the crowd.

There is silence in the Sportpalast.

“Well, a very entertaining parlor trick. But perhaps more work is needed. I will have the machine pulled apart for repairs.”

The Mechanical Man shudders again and raises its hand. This time it makes a daring move on the board and the crowd

cheers.

“Silence,” snaps Goebbels. “Silence!”

Goebbels inspects the board. There can be no dispute. He is in check.

Goebbels feels a fury rise in him. A hot burning rock that works its way down his throat. He can sense the crowd has turned. His foot feels dark and twisted, heavy in its sock. He reaches forward and makes another move on the chessboard.

This move is illegal. And he knows it.

Goebbels stares out at the crowd, daring any one of them to speak against him. His eyes dead with anger.

There is only silence.

“I believe the match is won,” he says. “The machine is good. But it is no adversary for German manpower. No adversary at all.”

The Mechanical Man stares back at Goebbels.

The crowd waits.

Then, first raising its arm high into the air, the Mechanical Man sweeps its hand across the board, sending the chess pieces flying across the stage, spilling them everywhere.

Some clatter down into the orchestra pit. One, a knight, hits the timpani, while two pawns careen into the audience. One lands on the felt brim of an old man's hat and the other comes to rest at the feet of Schwartz.

A silence more horrible than can be imagined fills the Sportpalast. But then, there is a laugh.

From somewhere at the back of the auditorium this single laugh erupts. This laugh is joined by another, and then another, and soon the whole Sportpalast is laughing at Goebbels.

“Silence,” he screams. But the laughter grows louder. “Silence!”

He storms off the stage, gesturing at a nearby officer.

“Come here,” Goebbels shouts at the man. “Burn it,” he orders, pointing at the Mechanical Man.

“Burn it to the ground. I want nothing left.”

“Herr Goebbels?”

“I want to watch it burn. Immediately.”

The officer turns to a soldier and says, “Bring gasoline from the generators.”

The two soldiers step clumsily across the stage, a large can of gasoline sloshing and clanking between their knees.

“And lift!” shouts the officer, and the men strain to raise the gasoline can above the Mechanical Man, dowsing it. They pour gasoline across the chessboard and then, as the can gets lighter, the men lift it higher and pour gasoline down the Mechanical Man’s face.

The crowd boos.

“Hey! What are you doing?” shouts someone from the crowd.

“Silence,” shouts the officer.

The Mechanical Man’s hat, heavy and sodden, droops

across his forehead. Thick streams of gasoline run down his cheeks and onto the floor. He does not move.

Goebbels strikes a match hard against his boot. It sparks to life; a tiny flame. The men throw the gasoline can aside and Goebbels steps towards the Mechanical Man.

•

Amelia's father pushes his way towards the stage, but he is too far away and the crowd is too thick. Heavy hands; legs and bodies; umbrellas and fur coats hold him back. The crowd cannot be shifted. He shouts out to Amelia, but his own voice sounds far, far away from him. His heart pounds recklessly as if it longs to burst from his ribcage and dart from him onto the stage and stop the awful scene.

Now he cannot watch. Goebbels has lit a match and holds it above the Mechanical Man.

The Sportpalast is suddenly silent. Every eye seems to sense that something terrible is about to occur. The match strike echoes between the walls, its ghastly flame dancing like a

hobgoblin in the frozen air. Then slowly, impossibly—surely impossibly?—Goebbels' fingers let go of the match and this tiny wooden splinter falls ever-so-slowly through the air.

Scale vanishes, and it seems to the inventor that it might be a mighty tree that has been set-alight and then felled above a giant Mechanical Man.

It tumbles and turns, an unstoppable force. And then – then!– a whoosh of air as the match hits the gasoline and satisfies its greed. The Mechanical Man is engulfed in flames.

It is as if all of Berlin has held its breath, and now – now the awfulness is visible – the crowd exhales, and with it, there are screams. The inventor falls to his knees.

•

The Mechanical Man sit quietly amid the roar. Flames melt and twist his body. The flames leap into the night higher and higher. The crowd pours out of the Sportpalast and into the snow.

•

“Here, come,” says Schwartz, lifting the inventor from the floor. “You must go before he finds you.”

The inventor stands in silence.

“Come. Follow me.” says Schwartz.

Schwartz leads the inventor to a waiting car and sits next to him inside.

“The station,” says Schwartz to the driver. Then turns to the inventor.

“Listen,” he tells him, “this was quite the stunt and... well I can't... this was not how I hoped it would end. But... well, it's always a risk. I have learned not to be surprised by the darkness.”

He looks closely at the inventor. His eyes blank and distant. As if he is a ghost.

“Because there is a cost to it,” Schwartz says. “A cost to feeling things. It is the price of being alive.”

They sit in the quiet of the car. Neither speaking.

“In these dark places,” says Schwartz finally. “We save who we can.”

He leads the inventor through a maintenance tunnel in the station and onto a waiting train.

“Good evening. Yes. This is the man. His name is... Otokar. Yes, to Prague. And let nobody else into his carriage. He is ill. Yes, very contagious.”

The inventor slumps into the bunk and Schwartz draws the blinds on the train cabin.

“Goodbye, Inventor,” says Schwartz. “It was a difficult game.”

Schwartz looks sadly at the inventor before hurrying out of

the carriage and back onto the platform. The train whistle blows and thick smoke billows from the engine. Then, with a great heaving sigh, the train pulls out of Anhalter Bahnhof and into the thick of the night. Schwartz watches until darkness swallows the last carriage and the train is gone.

The tick of the station clock.

The hush of snow falling on the roof.

Schwartz taps his foot on the ground. Once. Twice. Three times. Tapping in time with the clock.

And then he clicks his fingers and smiles.



Sunlight pours in through the windows, a zoetrope pattern scatters itself across the carriage. For a moment the inventor feels like a newborn. He can't remember who he is. He lifts his hands into the sunlight and watches the sun flicker across them. Then, a sadness arrives. It is a weight that creeps up from his chest and covers his body like a cloak. A memory that turns the sun cold.

He shifts his head, desperate to blot out the light, but realizes someone is watching him, sat on the bunk opposite him. It is a girl. He knows her. He feels himself come to life.

How could it be? How is she here?

It is Amelia.

"Amelia? Is that you?" he says. "Amelia!" He leaps up, embracing her. "Are we both dead? Is that it?"

"If we are, it feels a very pleasant kind of dead" says Amelia.

"The fire—" says the inventor.

"The fire?" asks Amelia.

"Where have you been, Amelia? How did you escape the fire?"

"I fell asleep in the Mechanical Man last night, and I woke up here," says Amelia, pointing at her bunk.

"Great Zeus!" says the inventor, his mind racing.

"You fell asleep and... and Herr Schwartz must have... and then put you here and... but how did the machine...?"

Then he realizes.

"Amelia! The Mechanical Man! He worked! He played that game Amelia, he played the final game and... goodness Amelia... He won!"

"He beat Herr Goebbels?"

"He almost beat him, but then Herr Goebbels set fire to the machine and I—oh god I thought you were inside Amelia."

Tears stream down the inventor's face.

"I thought I'd lost you. I thought... you were... they burnt the machine Amelia. They burnt it and it worked!"

"Are you very sad you lost him?" asks Amelia.

The inventor looks hard into Amelia's eyes and tells her "Amelia, nothing important was lost."

•

Goebbels stands in the Sportpalast alone. His foot kicking in the burnt remains of the Mechanical Man. He has been restless all night, and something has drawn him back to the stage. The evening was disquieting and it is as if there is something here to finish, something undone in the ash. He had certainly felt the crowd turn—there was an ugly mood.

He kneels and picks up a chess piece, it is a white pawn. Its head blackened by the soot. The tiny piece causes an ache in Goebbels—a feeling he cannot place. Then, as the sun casts shafts down the length of the auditorium, Goebbels' eyes are drawn to a metallic glint in the middle of the stage.

Goebbels walks towards the glinting object, closer and closer, his head feels light—"what is happening to me?"—and he stumbles the last few steps. There he sees, in the ash of the Mechanical Man, a familiar necklace. It is Lyla's necklace, a small jeweled bird, blackened by the fire. And there too is her earring. A single blue gem set in silver, cracked and darkened. And here; here is her bracelet. Tangled from the heat and wrapped around bone.

And in that moment, Goebbels realizes the awful truth of what he has done.

And what was lost.

A word tumbles out.

“Lyla.”



The train whistle blows loudly.

"Where are we going?" Amelia asks her father, rushing to the train window and peering out.

He joins her and they both stare out into the morning.

Thick forest stretches in front of them, but every now and again, between the melting snow and bare tree branches, there is a glimpse of bright blue sky.

Phoenix Kaspian
January, 2024
Vancouver