

**Bach at Leipzig**

**by**

**Itamar Moses**

CONTACT:

Mark Christian Subias  
331 West 57th St #462  
New York, NY 10019  
(212)445-1091

Draft: New York Theater Workshop FINAL 11/14/05

Cast of Characters

(7M)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ACT ONE

One

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

FASCH        Leipzig. June, 1722.

My darling Anna:

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

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

Recognizing my potential, Kuhnau began to give me private lessons in his study. It was clear to me, then, how profound was his devotion to the Lutheran faith. On his walls, above his writing desk, his washbasin, *everywhere*, he had affixed scrolls bearing the sayings of Martin Luther. Above his keyboard, one, my favorite, read: "Youth should be taught this art: for it makes fine, skillful people." And indeed, it was not simply as a musician, but as a person, that Kuhnau instructed me, alternating musical lessons with religious ones. Music, Kuhnau taught me, was God's gift to

us, and our only worthy way of praising God in return. And at the close of every lesson, he would say: “You, Johann, are my most cherished pupil.”

But, Anna, my meadow, my lamb, as I grew older, I found it in me, as never before, to *disagree* with Kuhnau. About composition, at first, as I tired of the rigid Forms he taught me. But, soon, my queries, like our lessons, shifted from music to religion. Need our music praise God *at all?* I wondered. Why not make it simply for each other? I found myself questioning even the most fundamental tenets of his Faith. Consubstantiation! Election! The Doctrine of Predestination itself! Each meeting would begin with humble apologies for the last, but soon would escalate to bitter argument. And, one day, when I went to his study for my lesson, bearing a *gift*, no less, that day...oh, Anna, my empath, this will break your heart... That day: there was another student in his room. A new student at his keyboard. And he said, Anna, I heard it myself, Kuhnau said to this boy: “You, Johann, are my most cherished pupil.”

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

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

(FASCH *turns...*)

Two

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

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

SCHOTT      Johann Friedrich Fasch!

FASCH        Georg Balthasar Schott.

SCHOTT      What brings you here?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

FASCH        What's that?

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

FASCH        Ah.

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

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

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

FASCH        How unusual.

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

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

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

FASCH        I hear nothing now.

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

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

SCHOTT        Of course. You were his student.

FASCH        Yes.

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

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

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

SCHOTT        What?

FASCH        May I go?

SCHOTT        You may. It was delightful to see you.

FASCH        May I go *inside*?

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

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



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

SCHOTT He does.

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

SCHOTT Yes. All these years.

FASCH What is he, seventy-five, eighty?

SCHOTT Eighty-one.

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

SCHOTT I can only hope that he is.

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

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

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

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

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

FASCH Let me pass.

SCHOTT No.

FASCH It is not your place to forbid my entrance.

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

FASCH I...beg your pardon?

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

FASCH        I am beloved in Zerst.

SCHOTT      I think not, Johann.

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

SCHOTT      That seems unlikely.

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

SCHOTT      I suppose, Friedrich, that it is.

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

SCHOTT      Very wise.

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

SCHOTT      I suppose.

FASCH        You don't think he'll mind?

SCHOTT      I don't think he'll notice.

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

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

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

SCHOTT      Yes. Yes. Right away.

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

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

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

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

I'll write again, when I have time.

Yours, Johann.

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

*(Blackout.)*

Three

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

LENCK        Leipzig. June, 1722.

My dear Catherina:

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

I have promised this before, it's true. As when I had you defraud your parents by feigning an expensive illness called Bogus Fever. I apologize again for discounting your warnings regarding your father's familiarity with medicine. But, after all, you were feverish. In any case, here is a chance for real glory: a post in Leipzig! (*Beat.*) I have promised that I could win a post in Leipzig before, it's true. When I auditioned at a church surrounded by cobblers, and, for some reason, under a bridge. But I faced a rival who was insurmountable. Once he blackmailed me with my history of feigning expensive illnesses.

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

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

FASCH        Georg Lenck. How wonderful of you to come.

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

FASCH        I trust that the trip from Laucha was uneventful.

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

FASCH No.

LENCK Oh yes.

FASCH It must have been dreadful.

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

FASCH Well, we are very sorry to hear it.

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

LENCK Excuse me?

SCHOTT For example, he might have stolen your music.

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

SCHOTT Lenck.

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

LENCK How is the Neuekirche?

SCHOTT Excellent. How is your health?

LENCK At risk. Like yours.

SCHOTT What?

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

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

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

FASCH Not a skilled diplomat?

LENCK The opposite: a musician.

- SCHOTT Did you take my ring?
- LENCK What? Oh. Yes. (*He returns a ring he obtained during the handshake.*) A keyboardist's fingers. If I don't keep them busy, they busy themselves. So! By the time word of Kuhnau's death reached me, rumor held that he had collapsed while performing.
- FASCH The deacons wouldn't allow us to move him until the doctor arrived. But by then, of course, it was too late.
- LENCK It's true?
- FASCH Yes. His music and his life, ending together, without the benefit of a cadence. A sudden and final interruption, of both the man and his art.
- SCHOTT It was dramatic in the extreme.
- LENCK The moment must have been.
- SCHOTT No, the noise. His head depressed the keys. We had to listen to those sustained notes for half an hour. The man performed his own dirge with his face.
- LENCK Sounds awful.
- SCHOTT It certainly did. Kuhnau's features were so smooth, you see, it was hideously dissonant. If he'd had a sharper nose, narrower cheekbones —
- FASCH Yes, Herr Schott, I'm sure that when you expire face-first into a keyboard, your hawk-like countenance will produce a glorious fugue.
- SCHOTT Thirds, at least. It might have been thirds.
- LENCK (*Moving towards the doors.*) The service is inside?
- SCHOTT No.
- FASCH Only the body.
- LENCK (*Beat.*) I'm sorry, so: he's all *alone*?

- FASCH I... (*Beat.*) What do you mean?
- SCHOTT The official memorial is to take place later on. For directly concerned parties only.
- FASCH Ah, yes. Music. Eulogies. Food and Drink.
- SCHOTT Prayer.
- LENCK And will you both attend?
- FASCH I was his most cherished pupil. And he: my only teacher.
- LENCK (*To SCHOTT.*) And yours as well? You being a native of the city?
- SCHOTT As it happens, no. I chose, instead, to learn music from my father. But we were colleagues, of course. Peers.
- LENCK Perhaps I will remain as well. For the food and the drink. After, of course, paying private homage now. He won't wait forever!
- FASCH Quite.
- SCHOTT Although, in fact, he will.
- (*LENCK opens the doors. Faint, sad organ music floats out.*)
- LENCK Who do you suppose is playing? Quite an honor, to accompany Kuhnau's...final public appearance.
- SCHOTT No one even asked me.
- FASCH Nor me.
- LENCK Well. Perhaps a harpsichordist is stretching.
- (*FASCH and SCHOTT precede LENCK through the doors. LENCK claps SCHOTT on the shoulder as he passes, skillfully removing a gold chain from SCHOTT'S neck. He turns out, into a pool of light, less sure of himself now.*)
- LENCK Catherina, things are on the turn. I promise you. And this time, I really mean it. I'll write again, when I have time.

Yours, Georg.

(LENCK *releases a pigeon...*)

(*Blackout.*)



Four And Five

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

KAUF Leipzig.

STEIND June, 1722.

KAUF My dearest Gisela:

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

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

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

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

KAUF Truly, Johann, you must reconsider.

STEIND I'm sorry, Georg, I cannot.

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

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

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

- STEIND      (*Quietly.*) Yes. I know it. (*Beat.*) But, as I'd very much like to attend this Memorial *before* —
- KAUF         Martin, please. My people do not want a war.
- STEIND      They ought to have considered that before they began bombarding Zwickau with missives insulting my father.
- KAUF         I beg your pardon. Those came in response to slanderous epistles from *your* city insulting our Prince. Furthermore, from what I have seen, *all* of the letters, from *both* sides, are signed by entirely fictitious Dukes! Have you considered that we may be the victims of a conspiracy by some tiny warmongering faction?
- STEIND      No. For each letter is in a different script.
- KAUF         Perhaps it is the work of a single adept calligraphist!
- STEIND      Ridiculous. And, whether the letters are genuine or not, the rift they describe is all too real.
- KAUF         Both our cities are Lutheran!
- STEIND      Yes, but *ours* is determined to remain that way. Your Prince allows bastardized cults to flourish! The Calvinists! The Pietists! All manner of unacceptable distinct sects! There is no hope of reconciliation.
- KAUF         Then why have I repeatedly been invited to stay as a guest on your family's estate?
- STEIND      Your understanding of politics is as nuanced as your music.
- KAUF         Why thank you!
- STEIND      A half-hearted show at diplomacy is the final step towards open war.
- KAUF         Your father is a lover of music, is he not?
- STEIND      I... What of it?

- KAUF I heard that, once, there was an organist who owed him an *enormous* sum, but so taken was he with the man's skill at the keyboard that he never collected the debt.
- STEIND Yes. He refuses to change his mind. What's your point?
- KAUF Think! *That* is what unites us! Our Art! Our Theatre! Our Music! *Culture*, Steindorff! That is, finally, in the end, all that distinguishes us —
- STEIND (*Wearily.*) From the animals, yes.
- KAUF No! From the English!
- STEIND What?
- KAUF From the Italians! From the rest of Europe!
- STEIND (*Beat.*) German Culture is all that distinguishes us from non-Germans.
- KAUF Yes! And I propose a renewed commitment to our common Germanity! These sects are not irreconcilable! For they are not so distinct after all!
- STEIND They are irreconcilable because they are almost exactly the same. The Doctrine of Predestination is the cornerstone of them all. But we Lutherans can accept the notion that an Elect few are Predestined for Paradise only if it comes with the private understanding that *all* of us are included. The Calvinists have made the small mistake of taking the same religion and imposing actual *standards*. Where they reign, they ban song, and *dance*, and all forms of *expressing* the very Culture *you* so revere. The strictures they impose close like a vise from without! Limiting all freedom! Meanwhile, sprouting like weeds from within, the Pietists embrace an *individual* spirituality that frees them from all limits! Both are disaster.
- KAUF You simply parrot your father's rhetoric, Martin. And *he* longs for a time that may never return.
- STEIND Is that so?
- KAUF Yes. The very beginning of religion. When all of us were simply Lutheran.
- STEIND (*Beat.*) I'm going inside.

(LENCK enters, followed by FASCH.)

LENCK        We'll join you.

KAUF         Wonderful!

STEIND       Ah. The Insufficient Prince.

LENCK        Shouldn't you be opportunistically performing?  
FASCH        Steindorff played during the viewing of the body.

KAUF         How marvelous!

STEIND       Thank you. I do believe that I was.

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

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

SCHOTT       Oh my dear god.

FASCH        Good morning, Balthasar.

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

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

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

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

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

SCHOTT       But...before we go inside...

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

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

- FASCH Well. Well. I do appreciate it. In fact, perhaps I should apologize for my behavior during that encounter as well.
- SCHOTT Accepted.
- FASCH All that remains now is to ensure that his legacy is carried on as he would have wished.
- SCHOTT Yes! My feelings exactly! Perhaps, together, we can bring that about.
- FASCH (*Offering his hand.*) Yes! Yes, to ensure that German music —
- SCHOTT (*Taking it.*) — remains exactly the same!
- FASCH Yes. What?
- STEIND Touching.
- LENCK Beautiful. Let's go in.
- FASCH (*Blocking the door.*) Just a moment. Again. I apologize. However. He would have wanted nothing of the kind.
- SCHOTT I beg your pardon. But I spoke to him daily for half my life.
- FASCH And, begging yours, let me suggest that I think perhaps he altered in his final days.
- SCHOTT I am so sorry. But why on earth do you think that?
- FASCH He wanted music to survive. And would never have robbed it of the one thing it requires in order to do so.
- SCHOTT And what is that, pray tell?
- FASCH Innovation!
- SCHOTT God forbid. Kuhnau prized good craftsmanship, yes, but never *innovation*.
- FASCH Only because he often mistook innovation for poor craftsmanship.

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

STEIND        He does this. It's very annoying.

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

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

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

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

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

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

KAUF            Me?

FASCH         My middle name is also Friedrich.

KAUF            How strangely inconvenient.

LENCK         Is this going to go on much longer?

STEIND        Yes, the Memorial won't wait forever.

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

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

FASCH,  
SCHOTT        Gentlemen!

FASCH         This should be of grave concern to you all.

SCHOTT        Indeed it should.

(*They turn back to one another.*)

- FASCH            Martin Luther did not nail his ninety-five theses to the great doors at Wittenberg only to have *you* rid the world of music.
- SCHOTT           Nor did he only to have *you* rid it of God! (*Beat.*) When the theme rises in a joyful figuration, it must be because the congregation, at that moment, sings of an Angel's joy, at the birth of our Lord. If the melody grows morose, it is at the turn of the story to Mary's grief as Christ lay dying, or because the word "sin" or "death" has cropped up in the text. And if we abandon these rules, we will write music that brings the heart to *any* joy, or to joy at *anything*. To joy without God.
- FASCH            *You sound just like him.*
- SCHOTT           Why thank you!
- FASCH            *Individuals gravitate towards individual expressions of faith.*
- SCHOTT           (*With contempt.*) So. You are a Pietist.
- FASCH            My point exactly! Why must everything have a *name*?
- SCHOTT           So that we know which houses to burn.
- FASCH            If a man feels his connection to the Eternal through pure music that brings pure feeling then it is the godliness *in it* that matters! Not that someone sings the word "God"! Form is an illusion! A fragile vase no sooner questioned than shattered! Why insist that *our* rules harden into permanence when no others ever have?
- SCHOTT           *Because we got them right!*
- FASCH            *But when you give people the choice —*
- SCHOTT           But Fasch! It is *choice* that is the illusion! Life, like music, *involves* choice *only* on the part of the Creator! Indeed: that was the *entire purpose* of the Reformation!
- FASCH            What.
- SCHOTT           The Doctrine of Predestination!

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

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

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

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

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

FASCH           Someone must.

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

LENCK           Which way to Italy?

SCHOTT          *This is not a joke!*

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

STEIND          Leave him, Lenck.

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

STEIND          I am insulted.

LENCK           I am insulting you.

SCHOTT          *You see!?* Germany is in utter disarray. Scattered bands of Dukes and Princes, sprouting like weeds, and turning on one other! And all the while



the Catholics close like a vise from without! Risen from the Mediterranean, an Italian ogre rattles the gates, roaring Vivaldi! To the southwest are poised a gaggle of French dances! And across the water, our own Georg Friedrich produces opera after opera for the English!

KAUF I am not across any water.

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

KAUF How —

SCHOTT And do not think that this threat is confined to music or to politics. French Cathedrals resplendent with gold and jewels! Drug-addled Italians painting the Son of God in whore's colors as some twisted grotesque! I do not know what they will call this ignominious new age, but it runs entirely *counter* to the spirit of the Reformation.

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

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

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

(SCHOTT *goes inside.*)

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

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

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

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

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

STEIND And now, father, it is time.

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

STEIND Yours, Johann.

KAUF            Yours, Georg.

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

*(Blackout.)*

Six

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

GRAUP            Leipzig. June. 1722.

Doctor Schultz:

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

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

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

In any event, once inside the gates, I descended upon the Thomaskirchof, seized a clergyman, and asked where I might find the others. Learning they'd taken quarters in the Church itself, I mounted the steps, wrapped in my most impressive cloak, and lurked just outside the antechamber until I heard voices. I then pounded on the door, so that the echoing crashes might silence their conversation and better prepare them to witness their approaching doom...

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

GRAUP      Behold! *(Beat.)* Damn.

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

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

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

STEIND      *(Thoughtfully.)* “Cantankerous.”

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

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

SCHOTT        I wish to discuss our agreement.

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

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

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

SCHOTT        But, oh: there is.

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

STEIND        What's that?

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

STEIND        Perhaps. What is his name?

SCHOTT        That *is* his name.

STEIND        Oh! I thought —

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

STEIND        What does he do there?

SCHOTT        He administers to the sick and the poor.

STEIND        Then, no. I do not know him.

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

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

SCHOTT        With a young lady.

STEIND She wishes to feel closer to God as well.

SCHOTT I am sure. But which one?

STEIND (Perplexed.) Which God?

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

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

SCHOTT Highly observant.

STEIND No doubt.

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

STEIND *(Outraged.)* He has not!

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

STEIND Oh, yes, I see.

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

STEIND Then I will have it dismissed as a forgery.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

STEIND Herr Schott. *Please.*

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

STEIND Unless?

SCHOTT Leave Leipzig.

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

SCHOTT *Laughter, Steindorff?*

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

SCHOTT Oh?

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

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

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

SCHOTT I love the Neuekirche!

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

SCHOTT I never applied!

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

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

(SCHOTT *walks away.*)

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

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

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

SCHOTT Is that true?

STEIND Almost heartbreaking, isn't it?

SCHOTT Yes. Almost.

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

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

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

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

STEIND     I was wrong.

SCHOTT     What about?

STEIND     Cantankerous is not strong enough. Not at all.

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

LENCK      Gentlemen! Here you are!

SCHOTT     Here we are.

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

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

FASCH      We are not.

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

LENCK      There, you see? Splendid!

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

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

KAUF       Oh, no. It *looks* like a tavern, but it is, in fact, a repair shop for musical instruments. There were a number of disagreements between myself and my musicians on the subject, but it turns out that they go there, you see, to have their strings tightened...when the tuning...

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

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

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



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

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

FASCH         How do the musicians play afterwards?

KAUF         *Better*, actually.

FASCH         Better how?

KAUF         With less urgency.

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

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

STEIND        Herr Lenck? May I have a moment?

LENCK         You may. But do not dally long.

STEIND        May I have a moment with *you*?

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

STEIND        Nevertheless.

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

STEIND        I wish to discuss your debt.

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

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

LENCK        Which one?

STEIND       (Perplexed.) Which father?

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

STEIND       Your monetary debt.

LENCK        Ah.

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

LENCK        This *is* beginning to sound familiar.

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

LENCK        Yes —

STEIND       — and also several horses and oxen.

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

STEIND       He wants it repaid.

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

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

LENCK        Your father well understands my circumstances.

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

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

STEIND       My father wants his money.

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

STEIND        You *have* had years.

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

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

LENCK         I see. Or?

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

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

STEIND        What shall I tell him?

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

STEIND        Ah. Do you refer to Catherina Kirkendale?

LENCK         I...Why yes, how — ?

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

LENCK         Perhaps. What is his name?

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

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

STEIND        Morally relativistic.

LENCK         No doubt.

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

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

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

LENCK Unless?

STEIND Leave Leipzig.

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

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

LENCK *(Beat.)* What?

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

LENCK What's that?

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

LENCK Of what?

STEIND That there is a war brewing.

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

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

LENCK A...heated exchange of provocative letters?

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

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

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

LENCK How?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**LENCK**            **Why is that?**

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

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

**KAUF**            **Gentlemen! Why do you keep us waiting?**

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

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

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

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

FASCH        Herr Schott will not dance.

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

FASCH        Still, there was no need to become aggressive.

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

STEIND       Gesundheit.

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

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

KAUF         To the dance!

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

KAUF         Oh, do you know her?

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

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

LENCK        Herr Fasch? May I have a...?

FASCH        What?

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

*(LENCK begins to weep.)*

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

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

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

- LENCK           *(Perplexed.)* Oh? Why is that?
- FASCH           Well, I was never one to heed rumor, particularly, but I have heard from more than one resident of Laucha that a mysterious nursemaid called Bodenschatz attends her at the oddest hours of the —
- LENCK           Yes, well, one never knows when the worst of it may strike.
- FASCH           One never does. But what do you want of *me*?
- LENCK           Her treatment is most...expensive.
- FASCH           Ah.
- LENCK           Appallingly so. Why, to ensure her survival would cost some four-hundred thirty florins!
- FASCH           I say!
- LENCK           *And* eighteen groschen. And nine pfennig.
- FASCH           What sort of doctor would demand a king's ransom for survival itself?
- LENCK           It is not the fault of the doctor. He is expert in the use of all forms of Emetics, Sudorifics, Febrifuges, and Mercurials. But *this* illness is as rare as the lady herself. And there is only one cure. Which, by the way, will also require several horses and oxen.
- FASCH           Oxen? What sickness *is* this?
- LENCK           It is called... False Pox.
- FASCH           *(Beat. He is not fooled.)* It sounds ...harrowing.
- LENCK           It certainly is.
- FASCH           *(Playing along.)* And...her family will not help?
- LENCK           The Kirkendales despise me, and are convinced that her illness is feigned, to steal their money!

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

LENCK            Since when?

FASCH            Why...since the flood!

LENCK            Zerbst is in the mountains.

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

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

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

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

FASCH            I have no choice but to live humbly.

LENCK            That is what I said.

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

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

LENCK            *Laughter, Fasch?*

FASCH            She is not sick at all. Is she.

LENCK            (*Beat.*) I cannot deceive you. For longer than I have already.

FASCH            For what reason do you need money?

LENCK            (*A chuckle.*) How long have you known me, Friedrich?



FASCH Since we tested the LiebenfrauKirche organ together in Sangerhausen, some... Oh. You mean: how *well* do I know you. Oh, Lenck! What will happen if it is not repaid?

LENCK Arrest. Imprisonment. Worse, perhaps.

**FASCH Then you must flee! Goodbye, Lenck.**

**(FASCH walks away.)**

LENCK **(Desperately.) My father, you know...was a wheelwright. Once, we resided on the land of a wealthy family. And, one day, we were banished, all of us.**

FASCH What on *earth* are you — ?

LENCK I watched as my mother died in penury, as my siblings scattered to alleyways and poorhouses, and I, the eldest, cared alone for my father, who, quite blind in his old age, would rave at me that I was not really his son. Then, one morning, his sight was restored! A tiny blessing at the end, I thought. Tiny indeed. That very day, he was felled by a massive seizure of the brain, the return of vision prefiguring only death. And, no sooner had I left the home of the black market surgeon to whom I sold his organs and limbs, I vowed that all my loved ones would be avenged. But what power did I have to do so? I am a musician, yes. But I am also a gambler. And so I honed my skills. I even went so far as to seek the aid of my cousin, a Mathematician. In fact, he lives in Zerbst. Perhaps you know him? Johann?

FASCH His name is also Johann?

LENCK No. His name is Maximilian. Why — ?

FASCH Oh. I thought —

LENCK Ah. Yes. No. *(Beat.)* In any case, he is only able to apply mathematics to falling anchors and rolling boulders and such things, and was of no use.

FASCH *(Beat.)* What sort of Mathematics does your cousin practice?

LENCK *(Very rapidly.)* Oh, he is a follower of Gottfried Leibnitz, who has made it his business to unveil the numerical basis of the physical world endeavoring to prove that a powerful order and meaning underlies even

nature itself. *(Beat.)* Anyway, years later, I returned to the site of my family's ruin, for a musical performance. Once there, I pursued an invitation to the evening card game hosted by the master of the house. Soon enough, I found myself seated across from the man himself. And, at stake, on our final hand, ownership of the very land where I was born.

FASCH        And?

LENCK        The trouble with cards, you see, is that, even in a game of skill, in which Queen, Jester, and Knave, find meaning only in combination, the contest is reduced, at the last, to its simplest element. To luck alone.

FASCH        What happened?

LENCK        I turned mine. And he turned his. I had a pretty run of Princes. But they were...insufficient. For he showed Kings.

*(LENCK weeps again, this time in earnest. FASCH consoles him.)*

FASCH        I wish that there was something I could do.

LENCK        There is not. *(Pause.)* Unless —

FASCH        Are you going to ask me to leave Leipzig?

LENCK        Would you?

FASCH        No.

LENCK        But Friedrich —

FASCH        *No!* I have my *own* mission here. As you well know.

LENCK        Then, then let me help you! Yes! We can plot together, to eliminate the others, each *must* be vulnerable, in, in *some* way —

FASCH        Lenck, enough of this!

LENCK        — to bribery, or blackmail, or, or *kidnapping*, and we'll *share* the post, its honor, its *salary*, yes, *I'll* take on the responsibilities you do not *desire* —

FASCH        *Enough!* *(Pause.)* **This post...This post, dear Lenck, is my opportunity to rescue our musical future. But I will have no mandate to do so if I**

**seize it through thievery and lies. Nor will I know, finally, in my heart, that I...that *he*... (Pause.) A position with the power to guide music must be gained *by music!* And music alone!**

LENCK Do they have *politics* in Zerbst, Herr Fasch?

FASCH Periodically. Yes. But the tactics you describe are better suited to situations when ordinary principles are suspended. To a state of war.

LENCK Well, as they say: politics is only war by other means. (*Beat.*) *I only...: You may find yourself with your principles intact watching the future of music from afar. Does that prospect not frighten you more?*

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

LENCK So be it.

FASCH I am so sorry.

LENCK That is to be expected. I am pathetic. I am bathed in defeat as surely as summer is in heat!

FASCH Some summers are unseasonably cold.

LENCK Only to my personal disadvantage, I'm sure.

FASCH *Oh, stop it.* This is laziness disguised as despair. None of us control our condition at birth. To guide our lives thereafter is well within our means.

LENCK Oh? And what was *your* condition at birth, *Herr* Fasch? Nothing that stood in the way of your advancement, it seems. Nothing that prevented you from marrying the woman you love! Please. Not *one* of you would willingly trade lives with me now.

FASCH To believe that *anything* is inevitable is an abdication of your responsibility to live. You are a gambler, yes. But you are also a musician! Indeed, that is how I *first* remember you, at Sangerhausen, perched at the organ, eliciting from all its speaking stops the most delightful sounds. You have an honest chance here, Georg. We all do. Not least because...and I cannot be the only one who has noticed...*he* is not here. The Great —

LENCK Shh! Don't say his name! (*Beat.*) Superstition.

FASCH           Very well. But his conspicuous absence is *surely* a providential sign!

LENCK           But Fasch, that is the worst of it. If not for all these years of poverty; of fleeing from debt, and escaping from cold cells; if not for so many deaths of those I loved; if not for all the hardships thrust upon me by some unjust hand... Oh, Fasch! The music! The music I could write!

FASCH           You still might! What is the alternative? To destroy the world as retaliation against its injustice?

LENCK           Ah. Well. (*Pause.*) In fact, Herr Fasch —

*(And a third time, there is a bustle of entrance. KAUFMANN, SCHOTT, and STEINDORFF hurry into the room. FASCH is exasperated at the interruption.)*

FASCH           Yes! Yes! We will join you in a moment!

KAUF            No, no! Help us! We need help!

*(For, it is now clear, KAUFMANN and SCHOTT are cradling STEINDORFF, who seems to have collapsed in their arms, barely able to walk, and who rambles, vaguely, as they convey him to a bench and lay him down.)*

STEIND          (*Slurred, confused.*) He will not... He will not let me...

FASCH           What is this?

SCHOTT          Betrayal! Skullduggery! By *your* hand!

FASCH           I beg your pardon?

SCHOTT          You shall not have it! For Steindorff has been drugged!

FASCH           But...! I...! My vial is safely ensconced here in my --

*(KAUFMANN raises a hand, holding up the vial for all to see: it is empty.)*

KAUF            We found this on the bench. Near Steindorff's goblet.

FASCH           Someone must have taken it from me!

LENCK           From your inside pocket? Ludicrous.

STEIND        He will not let me live!

SCHOTT        Don't try to speak, Herr Steindorff. Guards! Guards!

FASCH         Who, Martin? Who will not let you live?

STEIND        My father! *(Pause.)* I never wanted to be a musician! I wanted to be...a dancer! But he will not, he will not let me — !

*(GRAUPNER enters, arms raised, triumphantly.)*

GRAUP         Behold! Cower in fear! For standing now before you is The Great —

*(There is a pounding at the door of the Church: three slow echoing crashes. The men look towards the sound. A shadow is cast across the floor by someone just out of view.)*

GRAUP         *(Beat.)* Damn.

*(All bow towards the unseen man, except for SCHOTT, who turns out into a pool of light. The others follow, in turn. And, during their letters, a man strides very slowly into view.)*

SCHOTT        Leipzig. June, 1722.

Herr Kuhnau,

I write to you even though you are dead. For I am stunned to find myself surrounded by these men, these *pretenders* to your throne... And now...

GRAUP         Doctor, he's here.

KAUF          Gisela, please send my scores as quickly as possible.

LENCK         Catherina, please send more money as quickly as possible.

STEIND        I want to dance, father! Why won't you let me dance!

FASCH         Anna, a legend walks among us. And, though I believe in it not, I feel as I did when you and I first met: that I am in the presence of destiny.

*(The lights shift back. The new arrival is now downstage center, facing the double-doors. He strides towards them, those in the room parting before him like reeds, and bowing as he passes. He pulls open the doors. On this, SCHOTT turns back out.)*

SCHOTT     He has arrived. The Greatest Organist in Germany, Georg Phillip Telemann, has arrived. You'll hear from me again. In time.

Yours,

FASCH     Johann.

LENCK     Georg.

GRAUP     Johann.

KAUF     Georg.

STEIND    Johann.

SCHOTT    Georg.

*(Six pigeons are released at once...wings...wind...a final chord...)*

*(Blackout.)*

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

One

(FASCH, *alone.*)

FASCH        Leipzig. Late.

Anna,

Firstly, regarding your previous letter and the concerns you raised therein. I shall try, as you asked, to limit what you describe as the, “all-too-numerous terms of endearment” I employ when addressing you in writing. If they do, as you say, “diminish” you, that was never my intent. As a musician, the only thing I wish to diminish is the occasional seventh. Also: I was astonished at your report there has been a flood in Zerbst, which is, after all, in the mountains. Tell me: what has become of our home?

Speaking of which: you may be wondering about the moist condition of this paper. I write to you from the damp confines of a cell. I will not bore you with the details of my incarceration but, suffice it to say, I will require, as soon as you are able to send it, a new vial of the medicinal powder which, I can assure you, is more effective than we ever imagined. I am working to secure my release in time for the audition, though, as a precaution, I have selected a piece for performance with its melodies clustered in the center of the keyboard.

I am thrilled at the news that you wish to try your hand at composition! I agree that our home need not fall silent simply because I am gone, and so, I urge you to take up the mantle with vigor, you who have been my invisible support for so long! Thanks to you, our new daughter will hear music there even as I, here, attempt to provide her with a name. (*Pause.*) As to your question regarding what Form your first attempt ought to take... You well know my opinion regarding the bounds of Form, no less confining than the bars and walls of my current prison. I do concede, however, that it is difficult to begin anywhere else. After all, the styles of old must be understood thoroughly before they can be rejected as ridiculous. Innovation comes most easily when suppressed.

To that end, I recommend that you confront the dustiest form we have, cobwebs on its every surface, so limiting in its particulars that for every three notes, there are twice that many rules to be obeyed. Yes, my will-o-

the-wisp... (*Beat.*) You, Anna, shall write a Fugue. To begin: compose a melody played by a single voice.

*(Music begins: the Fugue in A-minor, for pipe organ, quietly, underneath.)*



This is called the *subject*. It must be beautiful enough to stand on its own, and well-crafted enough to contain the potential for more. Indeed...as soon as it is finished...it is joined...by a Second Voice...

*(At this, the second voice enters in the music, and SCHOTT becomes visible. He is seated near the doors, as we first saw him. And, as FASCH continues to speak, and the music continues underneath, SCHOTT begins miming Act One, Scene Two, reenacting his repeated opening of the door, fluidly, like a dance. He mines the scene as though FASCH, too, is retracing his steps, reacting to an absent interlocutor; though FASCH, for his part, simply continues with the letter to his wife:)*

...which begins its journey with its own statement of the subject, in a new octave, but reiterating, unmistakably, the theme. And, Anna, here is what distinguishes this Form: your First Voice does not now descend into simple accompaniment. No! It plays a new theme, a *countersubject*. And as the First and Second Voices reach the end of this encounter...both are joined...by a Third Voice.

*(At this, the third voice enters in the music, and LENCK gradually becomes visible, both he and SCHOTT in place for the start of Act One, Scene Three, which they begin to mime, as above, behind FASCH.)*

Difficult task! For this must engage the *subject*, as the other two have done, even as the Second Voice embarks upon the *countersubject*. And the First? It moves on to realms uncharted. And all the while no voice is subordinate to the others. No voice is in command. No voice can content itself with echoing chords or oom-pah-pahs. On the contrary, the texture of the whole remains throughout a discussion among equals.

*(Here, the fugue reaches the cadence at the end of the third voice's development. FASCH gives a gentle conductor's cut-off, and the music fades. LENCK and SCHOTT, having reached the end of Act One, Scene Three, depart.)*

At this point, Anna, it might behoove you, as an amateur...a word I use descriptively, not in diminishment...to bring matters to a close. But you see now, I think, the further possibilities. How, in a process known as *fugal exposition*, a truly daring composer could here introduce...

*(FASCH gives the down beat with his hand, and the music continues. KAUFMANN and STEINDORFF appear; miming through the top of Act One, Scene Four And Five.)*

...a Fourth Voice...or a Fifth...each taking up the subject in its turn and in its way...each grappling with the countersubject as it comes...each

introducing its own melodies and themes...and joining these to those that came before...

(LENCK and SCHOTT return, miming the sequence of greetings. The music, for its part, has now reached a section of episodic development.)

Now, the subject need not be heard at all times. Indeed, no, then we'd be quite sick of it! Rather, on the contrary, the Voices may seem, from time to time, to lose the subject all together, engaging in what are called *episodes*, taking tangential turns and straying far afield, introducing ideas that seem entirely unrelated and wholly new...but they always return...sooner or later...to your Theme...

(FASCH points skyward and, at this, the subject does indeed reenter, high above, and the pantomime of this scene reaches the point of SCHOTT'S impassioned speech.)

And this, Anna, *this* is why it must be a most worthwhile melody: so that, bell-like, it will ring out each time it sounds.

(LENCK, SCHOTT, STEINDORFF, and KAUFMANN exit.)

To my knowledge, no composer has ever dared a Fugue beyond Five Voices. But in theory, one could of course hazard...

(GRAUPNER appears, and mimes his letter from the top of Act One, Scene Six. During the following, he looks around, and stalks off annoyed.)

... a Sixth...sneaking in almost unnoticed, perhaps, given the complexity of that which has occurred already, but no less a distinct individual for being one in an increasing throng. And what then? How to proceed when all of your voices are deployed? What then indeed. For, now, the composer applies a series of what are called *fugal devices*.

(STEINDORFF and then SCHOTT arrive for their clandestine meeting, and mime their scene. FASCH, for his part, is, in spite of himself, becoming more and more excited with this description.)

When the theme reappears now, it is in a different mode all together, its key signature shifted from minor to major...or it might be *augmented*, stretched so that it takes longer to unfold...or it might undergo *diminution*, passing with a quickened step.

(LENCK and KAUFMANN enter from the tavern. After a brief flurry, SCHOTT and KAUFMANN exit, leaving STEINDORFF and LENCK behind to mime their scene.)

The melody may now harmonize with itself, in *stretto*, or, and this is most difficult of all, be *inverted*, turned upside-down, or run *backwards*, if it is a crab canon, which can be read in any way at all irrespective of direction!

(SCHOTT and KAUFMANN return. SCHOTT, STEINDORFF, and KAUFMANN leave, while LENCK remains alone. FASCH gestures, palms down, and the music fades.)

And these variations, Anna, give pleasure *only* in proportion to the attentiveness of the listener. For their significance derives, of course, from our knowledge of what has gone before. (*Pause.*) Then, a final riddle: how to end it? “The end of a fugue,” Kuhnau once said to me, “Must be surprising and yet inevitable. It must be both at once. All your voices must combine in miraculous polyphony, and that invisible lattice shall create a fabric of sound no single melody can ever achieve alone.” What did he mean? You likely wonder.

(FASCH gives the down beat. The fugue reenters, at a point, near the climax. FASCH conducts as KAUFMANN and SCHOTT rush in, carrying STEINDORFF, miming accusations and ministrations. GRAUPNER appears. They all look towards the outside. TELEMANN appears. They bow to him. The men each turn out for their final letters. TELEMANN marches through them. And, as the triumphant last three chords ring out, he flings open the doors, the others turn out for their sign-offs, and mime the release of their pigeons. We have reached the final tableau of the first act again.)

What can follow next, save thunderous applause? (*The ghostly tableau fades away. FASCH is alone.*) If you like that sort of thing. I, as you know, care not for Form. And do not feel badly, Anna, if you are mystified. Kuhnau’s explanation did the same to me. It was not until I wrote a Fugue myself that I understood, and, when I told him that the structure was now clear to me in retrospect, he remarked: “Structure is only clear in retrospect.”

It grows late. And, although this letter includes little about myself, I must ask you to copy over what you need, so that you might burn it, like the rest. I bridle at Biography, as you know. Chapters? Where are those in my life? Those clear demarcations, sectioning Time? Time does not chop itself up for our convenience. In a man’s own life, Time flows. It is always... now.

Yours, Johann.

*(He releases a pigeon...)*

*(Blackout.)*

Two and Three and Four and Five

*(The anteroom. LENCK and GRAUPNER, sitting. A moment.)*

LENCK        They've kept us waiting for some time, don't you think?

GRAUP        In what sense?

LENCK        In the sense that we began waiting quite some time ago, and the waiting period has yet to conclude.

*(KAUFMANN enters.)*

KAUF         Good morning!

GRAUP        Hello, Herr Kaufmann.

KAUF         Am I too late?

LENCK        **Your audition is not until much later today.** I'm first. Graupner is second.

GRAUP        Naturally.

LENCK        **The order is posted in a vestibule, behind one of the chapels.**

KAUF         **So I'm told. I am, however, having difficulty finding it. Which chapel?**

GRAUP        **The seventh from the left. But each is divided into three sections, which are, of course, sectioned into various divisions.**

LENCK        **Hope that helps.**

KAUF         *(Moving to exit.)* **As do I.**

LENCK        I think you may be last of the seven.

KAUF         Eight.

GRAUP        What?

KAUF         An eighth candidate arrived this morning. From Cöthen. Perhaps you know him? Johann?

GRAUP      Which Johann?

- KAUF           No, I was asking if you, Johann, know him.
- LENCK          *(Thinking he understands.)* His name is *not* Johann.
- KAUF           In fact, it is. Johann Bach. He delayed his journey due to the birth of a son. Not his first, to be sure, but an event nevertheless.
- LENCK          How is Steindorff this morning?
- KAUF           Gone, I'm afraid.
- LENCK          *Dead?*
- KAUF           No, merely gone. They found his room empty. No one had seen him leave.
- LENCK          And did you happen to notice any...soldiers in the streets this morning?
- KAUF           Soldiers? No. But then, I have not ventured beyond the borders of the Thomaskirchof since I heard tell of that unearthly moaning footpad, hooded and ragged, stalking the roads...Terrifying! *(He shudders.)*  
*Seventh from the left, you said?*
- GRAUP,  
LENCK          Right.
- KAUF           Oh dear.
- (KAUFMANN *goes.*)
- LENCK          I'm relieved to hear that Steindorff is, at the very least, ambulatory.
- GRAUP          As am I. To come upon such a scene!
- LENCK          Oh, I'm sure. But I'm afraid that I must bear some of the responsibility for the presence of the powder in his beer.
- GRAUP          How so?
- LENCK          I put it there.
- GRAUP          Really! But why?



LENCK      With the vial so accessible, right there, tucked into the lining of Fasch's inside shirt pocket, just barely beneath his jacket, I was tempted. To improve my chances.

- GRAUP But Fasch has been imprisoned for the crime!
- LENCK And thus it was more effective than I ever intended. Am I awful?
- GRAUP You are...only human. I witness the desire to silence the competition each time I look inside myself.
- LENCK In fact...with Telemann here...one might argue that the call for extreme measures is that much starker. That drugging Steindorff represents only one possible such measure among many. And that, now, to focus on one another is a waste of effort *better* spent swaying the Council itself.
- GRAUP One might. If one were so inclined.
- LENCK After all, any gambler knows that you'll seldom find friendlier odds...than one in two.
- GRAUP (*Pause.*) What are you proposing, Lenck?
- LENCK I have proposed nothing. Why? Are you open to a proposal of some kind?
- GRAUP That depends, naturally, upon what is being proposed.
- LENCK We can agree, I think, that, in the presence of a legend, this day will no longer be decided by the sounds we each produce from the instrument.
- GRAUP Well! When the Council hears my audition —
- LENCK Ah, but that is the trouble. However sweet the bellows you produce from the organ pipes, they will be no match for the sound of a name all Germany will recognize!
- GRAUP I...suppose...
- LENCK Fortunately, there is *another* sound that sways men more profoundly still.
- GRAUP Out with it, Lenck.
- LENCK A jingle, Herr Graupner.
- GRAUP You intend to *buy* the post? Just as the Catholics bought Indulgences?

LENCK      No. Not *just* as the Catholics bought Indulgences. For one thing, I intend to buy the post in secret.

- GRAUP           Martin Luther did not nail his ninety-five theses to the great doors at Wittenberg only to have *you* seize the most coveted post in German music using your wealth!
- LENCK           You mistake my meaning.
- GRAUP           Oh? Then I apologize.
- LENCK           I had hoped to use to *your* wealth.
- GRAUP           *What?*
- LENCK           Not for my benefit alone! I am prepared to *share* the post with an accomplice. And so I thought to myself: who here draws the largest salary? But, of course, Telemann has no use for me, so then I thought: who here draws the second largest?
- GRAUP           *(Quietly.)* “Don’t while away your worth worrying if you’re worthwhile.”
- LENCK           What?
- GRAUP           Georg: even if I had such an amount...and I do...how much of my fortune do you think I carry with me when I travel?
- LENCK           No matter! With my skill at the card table I can produce the requisite sum. *You* must simply provide me with an initial stake that exceeds my current means. And then I will content myself with whatever responsibilities you do not desire. Presiding over the Thomasschule, say, while you bask in the glory of composition and performance.
- GRAUP           I hesitate to rely so much on the chance turn of a card.
- LENCK           There is no chance involved! My cousin is a mathematician, a follower of Leibnitz, and has provided me with ironclad methods for victory!
- GRAUP           How does the behavior of flags in wind apply to gambling?
- LENCK           *(Beat.)* You are familiar with Leibnitz.
- GRAUP           I am a great admirer of his. Indeed, in a practice I learned from my old teacher, I have my favorite Leibnitzian sayings nailed to the walls of my study. Above my washbasin it says: “Music is nothing but unconscious

arithmetic." I prefer to rely on certainties, Georg. Not luck. My devotion to Calvinism allows me to accept nothing less.

LENCK      (*Beat.*) You are a Calvinist, Herr Graupner?

- GRAUP Yes. In Darmstadt, they call it Graupnerism.
- LENCK Really?
- GRAUP (*Small pause.*) No.
- LENCK But you have heard of the animosity between Merseburg and Zwickau?
- GRAUP Of course! Merseburg is respectful of its Calvinist citizens whereas in Zwickau they are cruelly persecuted.
- LENCK Intolerance is purely the result of irrational fear.
- GRAUP Indeed. They must be crushed so that Calvinism can rule all Germany.
- LENCK Or that. (*Beat.*) And so: I can confess to you, and you alone, the truth. Just now...when I asked after Steindorff's well-being...it was only to determine whether or not he had been...*found*.
- GRAUP Found?
- LENCK Even now, Zwickau's prodigal son lies bound and gagged in the forest outside the gates! In his stupor, I kidnapped him and put him there!
- GRAUP But...why?
- LENCK (*Ethereally, wonder-struck.*) I felt I had no choice. As though guided by some invisible hand towards supporting the Calvinist cause.
- GRAUP That, Herr Lenck, was Divine Will!
- LENCK (*Reverently.*) I don't doubt it. And it was that same force that seemed to demand that I approach you with this plan. Might it be that, together, we are God's allies, and that any joint endeavor is *certain* to succeed?
- GRAUP It just might.
- LENCK So are you with me? Or is it true what they say?
- GRAUP What's that?
- LENCK That you are only the second most daring organist in Germany.

*(The double-doors swing open. LENCK walks slowly to them.)*

GRAUP Wait! (*Pause.*) I cannot deny it. I spent the morning cursing Telemann's very presence, for making mine completely moot. Indeed, if not for all the patronage denied me and handed to him...Oh, Lenck! The music! The music I could write!

LENCK Well said.

GRAUP And this post...this post, Lenck, is my opportunity to prove myself the superior musician!

LENCK Plied with enough coins, the Council will be forced to admit it at last!

GRAUP I'll leave the money in your room.

*(They shake hands. KAUFMANN enters, unseen.)*

LENCK Splendid, Herr Graupner. If there is one man in all of Germany upon whom you can rely to scheme until this post is yours, and also somewhat mine, well, sir, that man is —

Herr Kaufmann, how unexpectedly you've returned!

KAUF I failed once again to find the list. What's going on?

GRAUP Herr Lenck...and I...are...

LENCK Rehearsing. A dramatic reading we shall perform for the rest of you.

KAUF Oh really? When?

LENCK This very evening. At eight o'clock exactly. Employing this...*strikingly theatrical* room itself as our set.

KAUF Is it a comedy?

LENCK Oh yes.

KAUF What is it called?

LENCK *The Unbelievably Credulous Fool.*

KAUF It sounds hilarious!



LENCK        It is. (*Beat.*) Excuse me. (*He turns to the doors.*)

GRAUP        Do you have your music?

LENCK        Oh. Yes.

*(LENCK opens his coat, revealing scores, strapped to his torso. He frees them, smooths them, and exits through the doors, which close behind him.)*

KAUF         A play! How delightful! I have been a devotee of the theatre ever since my mother took me to Paris as a child. We took in the latest by Moliere at his *Illustre Theatre*. I was transported.

GRAUP        Were you?

KAUF         Yes. Hundreds of miles. I fell asleep inside a crate of props. When I awoke, I was in Turkey.

*(SCHOTT enters.)*

SCHOTT       Kaufmann, what are you doing here? Your audition is not until —

KAUF         Yes: much later today. But I cannot find the list.

SCHOTT       Vestibule. Seventh from the left.

KAUF         Ah! *(He turns to go.)*

SCHOTT       How is Steindorff this morning? Dead?

KAUF         *(Turning back.)* No. Vanished. Left, you said?

SCHOTT       You said he left. I was the one who asked.

KAUF         What? *(Beat.)* Oh dear.

*(KAUFMANN goes.)*

GRAUP        So. One of our own, gone.

SCHOTT       Yes. But the number of candidates hold steady. Another has arrived —

GRAUP        From Cöthen, yes —

SCHOTT       Apparently, he delayed his journey pending the birth of two or three sons.

- GRAUP Yes. *(Beat.)* Still, it is a shame. Steindorff, lost...
- SCHOTT And I must confess that, in the matter of his drugging, the fault lies more or less with me.
- GRAUP In...what way?
- SCHOTT I drugged him.
- GRAUP You were tempted to improve your chances. With the vial so accessible —
- SCHOTT Right there, on the bench, next to the goblet Lenck had prepared especially for Steindorff —
- GRAUP And Fasch has been imprisoned for the crime.
- SCHOTT Exactly as I intended.
- GRAUP And yet: you are not awful. *(Beat.)* For...with Telemann here...one must allow that the odds are not yet...ideal.
- SCHOTT *(Beat.)* What are you suggesting?
- GRAUP You overestimate my subtlety. I have not suggested it yet. *(Pause.)* It's true, is it not, that Kuhnau never named a preferred successor?
- SCHOTT No one, I think, was more surprised by Kuhnau's death than Kuhnau.
- GRAUP And would knowledge of his wishes tip the balance here?
- SCHOTT We may bid the dead to speak, but they cannot.
- GRAUP But, oh. They can.
- (With a flourish, GRAUPNER produces a document from inside his cloak.)*
- SCHOTT What's that?
- GRAUP **A letter. Or, no, not a letter, but a piece of music that, when decoded, contains a message. From Johann Kuhnau. I received it shortly before he died. Shall I translate it for you?**

SCHOTT I expect that you shall.

GRAUP “Leipzig. May, 1722.

My dear Johann,

**I am not as strong as I once was. Daily, I can feel shadowy tendrils encroaching upon the edges of my vision. It will be time, presently, for someone to take my place here. If possible, I hope to secure for myself a role in the decision, if need be from beyond the grave. To that end, please come to see me at once. Godspeed, my friend. I look forward to seeing you soon.**

Yours, Johann”

SCHOTT He takes quite some time to say very little.

GRAUP Yes, he was well known for his long and elaborate missives.

SCHOTT Perhaps. But you were not able to speak to him as he asked?

GRAUP The letter reached me too late. A peasant shot down and ate the pigeon bearing it.

SCHOTT So you cannot be sure of what he meant.

GRAUP I think the implication is clear.

SCHOTT Someone attempting to be clear needn't bother with implication.

GRAUP Oh, but its vagueness speaks to its authenticity. If I'd written it myself, would I not have been as explicit as possible?

SCHOTT Certainly. **But you are left without decisive backing: the Council will not be persuaded simply because you give them your *word*.**

GRAUP You mistake my meaning.

SCHOTT (*Beat.*) Had you hoped to use *my* word?

GRAUP Not for my benefit alone! It's true, is it not, that, as a child, despite numerous applications, you were never admitted to the Thomasschule?

- SCHOTT No! No I *chose* to...to learn from my... How do you know that?
- GRAUP Kuhnau was my teacher, and I, his most cherished pupil. He told me of your rejection, after rejection, after rejection —
- SCHOTT His standards were most unjust! Valuing wealth and status over talent!
- GRAUP Nonsense. He admitted many who were needy.
- SCHOTT So you say.
- GRAUP It is well-documented. He financed entire educations from his own pocket.
- SCHOTT Very well —
- GRAUP There is a famous story of an orphan boy he found, starving in an alley —
- SCHOTT Enough!
- GRAUP — took him in, raised him as his only son—
- SCHOTT *Get to the point.*
- GRAUP While *you* clawed your way to a post at the Neuekirche, the second most important position in Leipzig! And, believe me, it's an indignity I well know. You became colleagues. Peers! You devoted all your energies to this pursuit, never remarrying, never having children, but *now*: an *audition!*? The very fact of it must enrage you.
- SCHOTT *Yes! (Beat.)* So: for what reason in this life would I secure your victory?
- GRAUP None in this life, perhaps. *But think ahead. To your own posterity.* When chosen, I will be in a position to reward you. I can place you in charge of the Thomasschule. The very institution that denied you so persistently. While I undertake the arduous work of composition and performance, I would place in your hands, Balthasar, the responsibility to shape our next generation of musicians.

*(The double doors open. LENCK emerges.)*

LENCK They're ready for you, Graupner. Hello, Schott. Best of luck to you both.

*(LENCK exits, with a glance at GRAUPNER. A moment.)*

GRAUP Lenck, by the way, intends to bribe his way into the post.

SCHOTT You don't say.

GRAUP I just have. He has offered to ally himself with me. But he is worse than Pietist, Balthasar. He is godless. Bound by nothing at all. I value freedom. But freedom must have limits. And I see in *you* a kindred spirit! One who likewise recognizes the threat to our faith —

SCHOTT Sprouting from within.

GRAUP Yes! So are you with me? Or do you prefer to risk rejection, once again?

SCHOTT Wait! (*Pause.*) I confess, if not for my banishment to a secondary post without influence or honor; if not for being denied access to my *own city's* resident master while every destitute halfwit between here and the Caucasus steeped themselves in his knowledge; if not for the irreparable loss, the unfilled void of my...of my...Oh Graupner!

GRAUP The music! The music you could write!

SCHOTT And this post would render all my sacrifices worthwhile! It is my chance to demonstrate that I am equipped not simply to study there, but to rule!

GRAUP After I have unilaterally granted you the position, the Council will have no choice but to acknowledge your qualifications!

SCHOTT Good Christoph. Please accept my aid.

(KAUFMANN *enters, unseen.*)

GRAUP Excellent. When the others are defeated, we will rule the musical world, and echoing from hilltop to riverbed shall be the glorious names —

Kaufmann! You've somehow learned to materialize from nowhere!

KAUF Have I? I had no idea.

GRAUP Well. Excuse me.

SCHOTT Do you have your music?

GRAUP Oh. Yes.

*(GRAUPNER reaches into his trousers, carefully unties the thread, produces a few scores, smoothes them, and exits through the doors, which close behind him.)*

KAUF That speech was marvelously performed, don't you think?

SCHOTT What?

KAUF Are you going to be in the dramatic reading as well?

SCHOTT *(Pause.)* What?

*(FASCH enters, massaging his wrists.)*

KAUF Fasch!

FASCH Kaufmann, what are you doing here? Your audition is not until —

KAUF Yes, I know, but I found the proper vestibule and the list is not there!

FASCH They moved it. The previous location, they determined, was too difficult to find. *(Beat.)* How is Steindorff this morning?

KAUF Enough! Why are you all hounding me? I didn't mean to drug him!

FASCH *You?*

KAUF Well, I saw Herr Schott doing it, and Herr Lenck doing it, and I thought perhaps Herr Steindorff was having trouble sleeping, and so I tried to help! I am sorry! Now leave me alone.

*(KAUFMANN exits. A moment.)*

SCHOTT You have been released, I see.

FASCH And I see that none of you were willing to help. Despite your guilt.

SCHOTT *Because* of our guilt, Fasch. To exchange your disadvantage for ours would be foolish. *(Pause.)* For...with Telemann here...the odds —

FASCH Herr Schott. Are you going to formulate a nefarious plan, with me as your accomplice, whereby the number of candidates can be reduced to two?

SCHOTT      Would you be amenable to such a formulation?

FASCH        Certainly not.

SCHOTT      Excellent, as I have no such plan. (*Pause.*) How *did* you secure your release by the way?

FASCH        I showed the guards...*this*.

(*FASCH produces a metal case from his coat, and opens it, removing a letter.*)

SCHOTT      (*Alarmed.*) What's that?

FASCH        It's a letter. **Or, no, not a letter —**

SCHOTT      **But a melody that when decoded contains a message?**

FASCH        **Yes. Which —**

SCHOTT      **You received from Kuhnau shortly before he died?**

FASCH        **Why *yes*. And in it —**

SCHOTT      **There is a clear implication that Kuhnau wished for you to succeed him?**

FASCH        **How on earth did you know?**

SCHOTT      **I expect that now you shall translate it for me.**

FASCH        **Very well, I shall!**

**“Leipzig. May, 1722.**

**My dear Johann,**

**I'm dying, and I wish to choose a replacement. Come at once.**

**Yours, Johann”**

SCHOTT      **He says so much with so little.**



- FASCH        **Yes, he was widely known for the concision and brevity of his letters.**
- SCHOTT       **Perhaps. (*Pause.*) But you were not able to speak to him as he asked.**
- FASCH        **(*Beat.*) You physically barred the door!**
- SCHOTT       Oh, yes, that's right. (*Beat.*) I only mean that, in your letter, nothing explicit is said.
- FASCH        Well, yes. But does that not —
- SCHOTT       In some way speak to its authenticity? I suppose.
- FASCH        **Though it does leave me —**
- SCHOTT       **Without decisive backing.**
- FASCH        **Yes.**
- SCHOTT       **And no one will be persuaded simply because you give them your *word.***
- FASCH        (*Beat.*) Are you offering to vouch for my letter, Herr Schott?
- SCHOTT       You underestimate my alacrity. I have offered already.
- FASCH        But...for what reason in this life would you — ?
- SCHOTT       None. But think ahead. To my own posterity.
- FASCH        (*Beat.*) What?
- SCHOTT       In exchange, you would give me authority over the Thomasschule.
- FASCH        You? In charge of the students?
- SCHOTT       Is that so preposterous?
- FASCH        The school never admitted you to begin with!
- SCHOTT       *How does everyone know that?*
- FASCH        He *rejected* you, again, and again, and again, and —

SCHOTT His criteria were horribly narrow!

FASCH He once admitted a boy with no hands.

SCHOTT All right — !

FASCH Not much of a virtuoso, but quite musical, he would —

*(SCHOTT grabs the hilt of his sword, and draws a portion of the blade.)*

SCHOTT Careful, Fasch. I'll not ask a third time.

FASCH What sort of man comes to an audition armed?

SCHOTT Wise men travel everywhere armed, in a world where marauders seem to own the roads outside the city. And usurpers own them within.

FASCH Are you threatening *violence*?

SCHOTT Not. Yet. But where reason fails, more direct methods become necessary.

FASCH In that case, why not simply destroy the organ? The new Thomaskantor would be without an instrument, and the prominence of your post at the Neuekirche would rise to fill the void. *(Beat.)* That was a joke.

SCHOTT Of course.

*(The double doors open. GRAUPNER emerges. SCHOTT hides his sword.)*

GRAUPNER They're ready for you, Herr Schott. Fasch. *(Beat.)* Best of luck.

*(GRAUPNER exits, with a glance at SCHOTT. A moment.)*

SCHOTT Graupner, by the way, also intends to invoke Kuhnau's wishes.

FASCH On what grounds?

SCHOTT He also has a letter. And has offered to ally himself with me. But I see in you a kindred spirit!

FASCH No you don't.

SCHOTT Perhaps not. But he is worse than Pietist! He is choiceless! Bound by everything! I value limits, but even limits must have...limits! Do not surrender Leipzig to the Calvinists. Your letter will hold no sway without my help. You would do well to ask for it, while it is still being offered.

(SCHOTT *walks slowly to the double doors. He stops. He looks back at FASCH.*)

FASCH Oh. Um. Good luck.

SCHOTT *Aren't you going to ask me to wait?*

FASCH What for?

SCHOTT Because! My movement to the door indicates that the opportunity to form a partnership is slipping away!

FASCH But our beliefs are completely irreconcilable!

SCHOTT And will the Council's decision adhere to *your* principles *or* to mine?

FASCH *Their* failure of vision must not cause our *own*. That is what having principles *means*. Indeed: while you *claim* to believe that there are no accidents, your *behavior* now suggests the opposite: that you think you will have nothing you do not seize by force.

SCHOTT I might say the same to you.

FASCH You might. But it would be strange.

SCHOTT No, Friedrich. While *you* claim to guide your destiny, in *fact* you *even now* allow the gates of heaven to open at the capricious behest of an unseen hand. (*He gestures to the doors.*) Seize the handle yourself. Now.

FASCH No.

(KAUFMANN *enters, unseen.*)

SCHOTT *Very well! But, I swear that I will take the honor that has been so long denied me. And, if you stand in my way, I shall not only show you my weapon, but draw it, and carve into your very flesh, as an eternal reminder of your folly, the name —*

*Kaufmann! Damn you, you stealthy dog!*

KAUF            I must say, this appears to be the most thrilling play imaginable!

SCHOTT,  
FASCH        (*Beat.*) What?

KAUF            Please, stop your rehearsal. I want to see it all for the first time, with fresh eyes, able to anticipate none of the surprises in store for me.

SCHOTT        I'm sure you are safe in that, Herr Kaufmann. (*Pause.*) Excuse me.

(SCHOTT *goes to the double doors.*)

FASCH        Do you have your music?

SCHOTT        Oh. Yes.

(SCHOTT *reaches into his mouth, and removes a tightly folded score from beneath his tongue. He unfolds it, and enters the double doors, which close behind him.*)

FASCH        A *play*, did you say?

KAUF            Yes! The one to be performed tonight! I think, perhaps, if I like it, I will bring it home to Merseburg.

FASCH        I saw Moliere performed at his Illustre Theatre in Paris once. I hated it. I chafed under the artifice. It depicted a world in which we are as bestringed

as any cello and thus banished...*meaning*. The characters all *happened* to disagree about whatever was centrally at stake; every action was *designed* to further events; people always entered at *exactly* the proper moment... The Creator's hand was all too clear.

KAUF What is the alternative?

FASCH To write a play in which the demands of its Form do not supersede the truthfulness of its Content! To stop hiding what we are behind tired conventions: the *deus ex machina*; or, the messenger who arrives with insanely detailed knowledge of tremendous events approaching from a distance; or, or, the Fool who suddenly speaks Wisdom —

KAUF But...forgive me, Fasch...what's the difference?

FASCH Between...?

KAUF Between the Form and the Content? Rather...how is it *possible* to write... Formlessly? What is the difference, finally, between choices that lead to a destiny, and a destiny prefigured by certain choices? Let's say *you* are the Creator. And you wish to give your characters choice. As you write, the choices are *yours*. As the play is performed, the choices are *theirs*. Your audience is aware of both, so both are true. And, it seems to me, you cannot deny one without denying the other. Where those on stage have control, so do you. Where you have none, neither do they. After all, if you seat your characters in an unchanging place, at the mercy of some unseen force, conversing to no purpose, passing Time...Well: there is no destiny in that world, to be sure, but no choice either. And even *that* is a Form. A Formless Form. Haha. This old world, Fasch, will be new again, and again, and so after us will come new Forms *we* cannot imagine, because we do not yet *need* them to explain the world to ourselves. Which is, in the end, all they are meant for: not to hide what we are. But to remind us.

FASCH (*Pause.*) Yes. (*Pause.*) Well. (*Pause.*) I still hate Moliere.

KAUF The discipline remains unperfected. That is why there are still playwrights. (*Beat.*) **And now I must go off again in search of that list. To where did you say they had moved it?**

FASCH **I didn't.**

KAUF **Ah. That may be the source of my confusion.**



(KAUFMANN *turns and goes, before FASCH can speak again. The doors open, and SCHOTT emerges, pale and shaken.*)

FASCH        Herr Schott! Why are you finished so quickly?

SCHOTT       I was interrupted. The Council cut me off in mid-phrase.

FASCH        But why?

SCHOTT       They have grown impatient and decided to change the order.

FASCH        But then... Who is next?

(TELEMANN *appears. A moment. Then, he walks towards the doors, music tucked under one arm, ignoring the bows from the other two as he passes between them. He opens the doors, flexes his fingers, once, and enters. FASCH and SCHOTT close the doors behind him.*)

SCHOTT       I really hate him. *(Pause.)* Well! If the Council imagines that I shall sit here, waiting, they are mistaken. For I shall not.

FASCH        Yes. Yes. Nor I.

SCHOTT       Well then. *(Pause.)* I'll be off. *(Pause.)* Best to you and yours, Johann.

FASCH        And yours, Georg.

*(Blackout.)*

Six

(The anteroom. Hours later. FASCH and SCHOTT are seated outside the double-doors.)

SCHOTT It's been a long while since he went inside, don't you think?

FASCH In what sense?

SCHOTT In the sense that he went inside a long while ago, and has not yet emerged.

FASCH It's nearly eight o'clock. You're quite right. (Pause.) Herr Schott.

SCHOTT What.

FASCH Do you want to know *why* Kuhnau rejected you from the Thomasschule?

SCHOTT What? Well, I... (Beat.) Did he *tell* you?

FASCH Yes.

SCHOTT I... (Pause.) What did he say?

FASCH That you were, in one sense, a brilliant young musician. That your compositions were exquisitely well-crafted. Each note in place. Every rule obeyed. But that, in another sense, you were not a musician at all. That the ineffable beauty that transcends structure eluded you. Never an original melody. No note surprised. He felt, Balthasar, that he had nothing to teach you. And that the things you lacked could not be taught.

SCHOTT (Pause.) Why are you telling me these things?

FASCH Because: *despite* them, or, perhaps even *because* of them, I —

(KAUFMANN *hurries in, excitedly.*)

KAUF Am I too late?

FASCH For your audition?

KAUF No! I was told that, tonight, in this very room, at this very hour, I could witness the World Premiere performance of an hilarious new comedy entitled: *The Unbelievably Credulous Fool!* But, Fasch, I *did* take your



comments very much to heart. So I intend to observe with the eye of a craftsman not easily taken in by artifice. So please! Begin!

(KAUFMANN *seats himself, and watches, expectantly. A moment.*)

FASCH       What was I talking about?

KAUF         Ah. *In medias res*. The classic opening.

FASCH       It is possible that they are offering him the post at this very moment.

SCHOTT      Kuhnau's post *is* the Council's to fill.

KAUF        My word! This script is *remarkably* apropos.

FASCH,  
SCHOTT      Shut up, Kaufmann.

KAUF        And highly experimental as well.

FASCH       And so: I accept your offer. Let us combine our efforts. I will take the kirche, you, the schule.

KAUF        Oho! The plot thickens.

FASCH       (*Offering his hand.*) Are we agreed?

SCHOTT      (*Pause. He accepts the handshake.*) Yes.

(*With a swirl of his cloak, TELEMANN enters. Not from the double-doors, but from the direction of the rooms. He is dressed for travel, as when he arrived. KAUFMANN, seeing him, gasps. A moment. Then, he crosses, not glancing at FASCH and SCHOTT, who bow, and exits to the outside.*)

KAUF        Oh, cleverly done! For *I* assumed that it *was* Telemann in the room with the Council! Now, a vacuum of knowledge has been created, begging the question: why is Herr Telemann departing?

FASCH       (*To KAUFMANN*) Herr Telemann was offered the post this afternoon. But he has turned it down. It seems he negotiated in advance, with his employers at Hamburg, securing a promise that they would triple his salary to keep him. (*Beat.*) He has, by the way, a gorgeous speaking voice.

KAUF            Direct address to the audience is *by far* the laziest form of exposition.

FASCH            (*Beat.*) *What!?*

KAUF            *And:* we now also wonder: who is inside after all?

(*The double-doors open. GRAUPNER emerges. KAUFMANN gasps again.*)

SCHOTT          What has happened?

FASCH            What did they say?

GRAUP            They've offered me the post.

(*KAUFMANN gasps most loudly of all. A beat.*)

SCHOTT          And I look forward to sharing it with you, as you promised.

FASCH            No, Balthasar!

GRAUP            That promise was made in return for support you did not give me. And which proved unnecessary in any case.

SCHOTT          But you nevertheless feel loyal to my intent.

FASCH            And what of *Kuhnau's* intent? Made clear in his letter to *me*?

GRAUP            You also have a letter?

FASCH            Yes.

GRAUP,  
FASCH            But *mine* is genuine.

SCHOTT          Fasch's letter is a forgery! I vouch for Herr Graupner!

GRAUP            Schott, the point is *moot*. In fact —

(*Suddenly, with a howl, LENCK sprints in. He is wearing only rags, waving a sword. KAUFMANN leaps up, as LENCK collapses in the center of the room, wailing.*)

KAUF            Run! It's the demented thief from the woods!

SCHOTT      It's Lenck.

GRAUP      Yes, the man from the woods had a hood concealing his face.

KAUF      Oh, thank goodness. Spectacular entrance, Lenck!

GRAUP      Where have you been?

LENCK      At the tavern.

GRAUP      Ah. (*Beat. He looks LENCK over.*) And how did that work out for you?

LENCK      Not well. I've lost everything.

FASCH,  
GRAUP      All the money I gave you?

FASCH      Oh dear.

GRAUP      (*To LENCK.*) So much for your intent to bribe the Council.

FASCH      (*Baffled.*) Bribe the Council?

GRAUP      (*Earnestly confused.*) Oh were you not a part of that particular scheme?

FASCH      Certainly not! And I know better than to hand coins to Lenck himself. No, he sent an emissary, a loyal nursemaid called Bodenschatz. She assured me that Lenck was quite ill with a severe case of something called The Swindles! (*Beat.*) Oh, I see.

LENCK      Then, with the money gone, I lost Schott's necklace.

SCHOTT      I knew it!

FASCH      And your clothing was the last to go.

LENCK      Oh, how I wish. But finally, you see, determined to win it all back, I reached into my shirt, cut the straps, and bet my music. And...

Even when I'd lost my scores...all of them...I thought, surely, the man would give them back. What possible use for them could this, this tavern keeper, have?

But he smiled! “Don’t worry, little musician, I have found a use for them after all. This summer, you see, is unseasonably cold.” And it was then that I noticed that, despite wearing only these rags, I was...I was quite... *warm*. A vibrant fire raged across the room. And I? I ran.

*(A moment. KAUFMANN clutches his chest, moved by the speech.)*

- KAUF            Bravo! Bravo! Oh, it is a masterful comedy that can be moving as well!
- LENCK           Thank you, Kaufmann. But I would never have written such a role for myself, had I the choice.
- SCHOTT          Are you the one who has him so confused?
- LENCK           As you know, Herr Schott, I found him that way.
- FASCH           Georg, I am...so sorry.
- LENCK           No need! For, on my way across the courtyard, who should I encounter but Herr Telemann, departing! And, on his lips, the latest news! Is it true, Christoph? Are you the second choice for the post?
- GRAUP           I... Did Telemann use those words?
- LENCK           Yes. He has, by the way, a gorgeous speaking voice.
- GRAUP           I am.
- LENCK           And I look forward to sharing it with you, as you promised!
- SCHOTT          No Christoph!
- GRAUP           But all you did was lose my money! You failed utterly to bribe anyone! And the scheme was unnecessary in any case!
- LENCK           Yes but given my noble *intent* —
- GRAUP           Lenck, the point is *moot*! In fact —

*(STEINDORFF enters, in rags, limping, stumbling, festooned with leaves and branches, howling. A hood conceals his face and his hands are bound. Indeed, for this reason, his identity is not immediately clear. KAUFMANN leaps up.)*

KAUF            Run! It is the Ghostly Footpad of the Forest! Hooded, as you said!

LENCK           No. It's only Steindorff.

STEIND          Kaufmann! Free my hands! Uncover my head!

KAUF            Audience participation! Revolutionary!

(KAUFMANN *frees* STEINDORFF.)

STEIND          Who has done this to me?

FASCH           In fact, Martin, the question of who drugged your beer is a complex one.

STEIND          What? No. *That* I did myself. I mean: how often does one have the chance to sample high quality opium?

FASCH           It is not opium!

STEIND          Fasch, I think I know opium when I ingest it.

FASCH           No! It is...a mysterious powder from...the Far East...with the power to ease pain and bring about...pleasant dreams...goddamn it...

STEIND          But then! As I lay in my drugged state, a crime took place. I was kidnapped! Taken deep into the forest, and dropped there! I traveled, blind! I was robbed by peasants, who stole my boots, which contained my music! All day passed with no sustenance, and I became so hungry that I was forced to kill and eat a messenger pigeon! But I forged onward. And, happy day, I enter at *exactly the proper moment* to find all the potential culprits gathered together!

KAUF            I see your point, Fasch. It does smack of contrivance.

FASCH           It's over, Steindorff. Herr Graupner has been offered the post.

STEIND          Graupner!? (*Beat.*) I *think* I've heard the name, but I'm not quite —

GRAUP          Gentlemen! The point is moot! In fact —

KAUF            No, no, no! It would be much funnier if, at this point, Graupner were interrupted for a *third* time. Please consider making that revision. (*Beat.*) Carry on.

GRAUP I've rejected the post! (*Pause.*) My purpose here was to defeat Telemann. Now I can accomplish only the opposite, affixing to my name, for all time, the moniker: *second choice*. Instead, I shall return to Darmstadt and await my next chance to face him. And I shall not leave empty handed! Before I left, I secured from my employers a promise that they would double my salary to keep me!

FASCH (*Beat.*) Yes, well done, Graupner.

KAUF Oh, very amusing! For *we* know, though he does not, that Telemann has employed precisely the same strategy, with superior results!

GRAUP (*Beat.*) He did what? (*Pause.*) Damn. (*Quietly, to himself.*) "Think less of those who think less of you." (*He begins to walk off.*)

FASCH But...may *we* now enter?

SCHOTT And speak to the Council?

GRAUP (*Turning back.*) They have departed for the night. Through the stained glass. On the other side of the cathedral.

(GRAUPNER *leaves. A moment. The others regard one another.*)

KAUF Is this what's known as a "hiatus"?

STEIND What exactly have I missed?

KAUF Recapitulation! (*Very rapidly, miming action and characters:*) Fasch and Graupner each have letters which suggest that one of them may have been Kuhnau's personal choice for the post, and, learning this, Herr Schott attempted to strike illicit deals with both of them, bartering his support for the veracity of either letter in exchange for mastery over the Thomasschule, his repeated rejections from which having left him bitter and acrimonious. Meanwhile: Lenck's attempt to *bribe* the Council, using funds provided, wittingly by Graupner and unwittingly by Fasch, and then compounded at the tavern, was thwarted by his incompetence as a gambler, leading to a lamentation of such heart-rending pathos that *this* jaded spectator found himself on the brink of tears! (*Beat.*) Oh, which is not to say that *your* speech, Martin, was not well delivered. It *was*. Yes. Um...*Fier*y. But it is less well-crafted. For one thing, the loss of your music was the result of random misfortune, whereas. In Lenck's case, he

ironically brought it about himself. Your speech also suffered as a result of its position, immediately following *another* impassioned litany.

*(There is a scream from off-stage. GRAUPNER hobbles back into the room. There is an arrow in piercing his thigh. KAUFMANN leaps up.)*

KAUF           Run! It's the Frothing Marauder of the Glade!

SCHOTT        Kaufmann, what is the matter with you? That is clearly Graupner!

KAUF           Oh, yes. I assumed that, after two false entrances, the deranged outlaw would surely appear next.

SCHOTT        Yes, well, traditionally, the third entrance *would* be the pivotal one, but...  
*(Beat.)* What am I saying?

*(Meanwhile, FASCH has gone to GRAUPNER.)*

FASCH         What is going on?

GRAUP         Tremendous events! Approaching from a distance! Closing like a vice before me, blocking my egress: *soldiers! Hundreds* of them, swords drawn, arrows in flight...ah!...Attempting to slip by, I took this wound. Which has pierced the music stitched to my thigh, and soaked it in my blood! I sought sanctuary in the Church, but even now they make camp on the cobblestones below! *(Beat.)* Apparently, the last man to escape the city was Herr Telemann.

FASCH         Who are they?

GRAUP         Half of them wear the livery of Zwickau, and the rest carry the banners of Merseburg. But they are allied together! Forces joined against a common enemy!

FASCH         Who?

GRAUP         The sole culprit behind the heated exchange of provocative letters.

FASCH         The heated exch —

GRAUP         Yes! Apparently, it was the work of a single adept calligraphist, and now he has been traced...to here!

LENCK        *(Beat.)* He has?

GRAUP        His final letter was sent from the pigeon loft of the tavern across the street just last night and bore the unmistakably genuine seal of the Leipzig Guild of Musicians.

SCHOTT       *(Beat.)* The what?

GRAUP        And it revealed a lecherous affair between the wife of Merseburg's Ambassador and the son of Zwickau's lord.

STEIND       *(Beat.)* Did it?

GRAUP        And so, until the guilty party surrenders, the armies will lay siege. And fire upon any organist answering to the name Georg! Or Johann!

*(KAUFMANN applauds the obvious climax. Then hesitates.)*

KAUF         The wife of Merseburg's Ambassador did you say?

GRAUP        Yes. Gisela by name.

KAUF         Oh. I see. *(Pause.)* Well! Thank goodness this is only a play!

*(There is a pounding at the door of the Church: three slow echoing crashes. The men look towards the sound. A moment.)*

GRAUP        They are here.

*(KAUFMANN takes a step towards the door. He looks around at the others. He goes to GRAUPNER, and touches the wound, raises fingers covered with blood...)*

KAUF         Oh. *(Pause.)* Oh! I... I see!

GRAUP        I'm not wounded badly.

KAUF         But *I* am! Oh, Gisela... The Unbelievably Credulous Fool... is me.

*(From outside, the sound of drums.)*

SCHOTT       How appropriate. The Thomaskirche is besieged.

*(Blackout. The sound of drums continues...)*





Seven

*(The anteroom. Hours later. The sound of drums. GRAUPNER, his wound dressed, lies unconscious in the center of the room. STEINDORFF enters, fleeing. Exhausted, he leans for a moment against one wall. KAUFMANN enters in pursuit, sword drawn.)*

STEIND      Friedrich, there is no need for this.

KAUF      I shall sever every part of you that has touched my Gisela.

STEIND      Ahh!

*(KAUFMANN attacks. They exchange a few blows. STEINDORFF flees. KAUFMANN pursues. SCHOTT enters. He is carrying a hammer. He pauses for a moment in the center of the room, as gazes at the double-doors. Then, hearing approaching footsteps, he ducks through an exit, and out of view. LENCK enters, sword drawn. He is dressed as a nursemaid. He looks around, warily. STEINDORFF enters, and spots LENCK.)*

STEIND      Oh, Lenck, thank goodness, I'm... *(Beat.)* What on earth are you wearing?

LENCK      It's the only clothing I have left.

STEIND      No matter. He's gone *mad*. And is, for the moment hopelessly, lost among the vestibules. Save me! All debts between us will be cancelled!

LENCK      Yes. *(Pause.)* It is time to cancel the debts between us.

STEIND      *(Beat.)* What?

LENCK      At last my father the wheelwright shall be avenged!

STEIND      *(Beat.)* Your...? But...! Ahh! Lenck!

*(LENCK attacks. They exchange a few blows. STEINDORFF flees. LENCK pursues. SCHOTT reenters, and walks towards the double doors. FASCH enters, kneels by GRAUPNER, and searches his pockets. He sees SCHOTT.)*

FASCH      Herr Schott.

SCHOTT      Fasch. What are you doing?

FASCH      I gave my opium to Graupner for his pain. Now I cannot sleep. *(Beat.)* Is that a hammer?



SCHOTT      What? This? Yes. Yes, it is.

FASCH        What for?

SCHOTT      So that I might...lodge a protest! Yes. Against the unfairness of the audition! In the form of Ninety-Five Theses! To be nailed here to the Great Doors of the Thomaskirche itself!

FASCH        Where is this document?

SCHOTT      Naturally, I cannot show it to you.

FASCH        *(Beat.)* You're here to destroy the organ.

SCHOTT      That is absurd.

*(FASCH has moved to block the door.)*

FASCH        Yes. It is. This is a time for solidarity. Not for violence.

*(STEINDORFF stumbles in.)*

STEIND      Help me!

*(STEINDORFF flees off the other side. LENCK and KAUFMANN enter in pursuit.)*

LENCK        *(As he passes.)* It's the only clothing I have left.

*(LENCK and KAUFMANN run off.)*

FASCH        What is *happening* here?

SCHOTT      War! The threat from outside has absolved us of responsibility.

FASCH        Chaos, Balthasar? From you? Surely, as a devout Lutheran —

SCHOTT      Oh, but we are not Lutherans. Not tonight. Tonight, we are Pietists.

FASCH        You are *animals*.

SCHOTT      That is what I said. And who are you to disapprove? You too are a carrion bird on Kuhnau's corpse. Now let me pass.

FASCH      No. *My* purpose here is as a bulwark. Kuhnau needs me to protect him.

SCHOTT     Oh. Your letter.

FASCH Yes!

SCHOTT Fasch: it is a forgery.

FASCH You cannot know that

SCHOTT I can! For I wrote it! And I sent it!

FASCH *(Pause.) What?*

SCHOTT *(Circling, spinning a web.)* Kuhnau hoped to guide events posthumously, yes. He would write, he said, to his most cherished pupil. A man called Johann. And so I wrote you first. An encoded melody: “Johann. I wish never to see you again. Stay out of my sight, forever. No matter what else you might hear from me in the future. Yours, Johann.”

FASCH But that is not what it said.

SCHOTT That is *also* what it said. Quite by accident, you see, I created a crab canon. The piece can be read just as easily backwards and upside-down. Until you showed me my *own* letter this afternoon I had no idea why you’d come. But then I saw: I myself inadvertently summoned you here.

FASCH But...Kuhnau did...*plan*...to write to me?

SCHOTT No. He wrote to Graupner. Another pupil. Another Johann.

FASCH “You....Johann...are my most cherished...”

SCHOTT So it is settled, Fasch! We have no quarrel! You may let me by!

FASCH No. No, whether he wrote to me or not, I, I must... I must believe that he wanted me back! *I must believe it!*

SCHOTT Blind faith, Fasch? From you? You must let it go. We both must. Let us cross this threshold together. Then, Fasch, then! The mu — !

*(FASCH smashes SCHOTT across the face. SCHOTT spins and falls.)*

SCHOTT Oh! I think I swallowed my music. *(Pause.)* So be it.

*(SCHOTT draws his sword. FASCH draws his own. STEINDORFF runs in, pursued by KAUFMANN. LENCK enters from the other side. STEINDORFF is trapped. Seeing*

FASCH and SCHOTT, *the others cry out, startled.* GRAUPNER *wakes up, with a cry.* *Everyone screams.* GRAUPNER *looks around and sees a ring of five swords.)*

GRAUP        *(Beat.)* It is opium.

*(The fight begins in earnest. FASCH fights SCHOTT, STEINDORFF fights KAUFMANN and LENCK, GRAUPNER, caught, fends off wayward blows. The combat rages all over: benches and candelabras overturned, and so on. And, at its peak SCHOTT runs FASCH through, pinning him to the double-doors, through the chest... FASCH slides to the ground...STEINDORFF'S sword is dashed from his hand, and death-strokes from KAUFMANN and LENCK loom over him...SCHOTT heaves FASCH aside, seizes the handles, and triumphantly flings the doors wide...a great flood of sound emerges. SCHOTT stands framed in the doorway as the music washes over him. It is the climax of a six-voice fugue by Bach. Everyone freezes.)*

SCHOTT      My God. What is it?

LENCK        It's a fugue. You can hear the subject. And its counterpoint.

STEIND      And there are three voices at least.

KAUF        No, no. There are four.

GRAUP      Wait. No. There, in the bass: it's five.

*(The fugue cadences, and fades.)*

FASCH        You're all quite mistaken. There were six.

*(FASCH collapses. SCHOTT remembers himself. He kneels beside FASCH.)*

SCHOTT      Oh! Oh, Fasch, what have I done? *(Pause.)* Friedrich? *(He looks around at the others, wildly.)* I... I felt I had no...This was...This has been... *predestined*, you see, it...I cannot be held resp...Oh god. Oh god.

*(SCHOTT stands. He begins to walk off, towards the outside.)*

KAUF        Balthasar, they will kill you!

SCHOTT      I must be judged. For my crime.

*(SCHOTT walks slowly off. There is a long, long pause. The others cannot look at one another. Some sit. Others begin to speak, and then stop. Then: SCHOTT runs back in.)*



SCHOTT     A miracle! The armies have departed. One soldier alone remained and only to carry us this message. (*He reads a note.*) “We cannot kill a man capable of producing such beauty. Whatever he has done.”

LENCK I don't understand.

GRAUP How did he quell and banish two armies with so little music?

FASCH (*Stirring.*) No. Don't you see?

*(The others react, startled, relieved.)*

FASCH It's all right. I'm all right. The metal case around Schott's forged letter from Kuhnau caught the blade. I was only winded. (*Beat.*) Don't you see? He has been playing all along. For hours. We alone did not hear him. It is only clear, after all, from a greater distance. (*Pause.*) Who was that?

SCHOTT It was Johann.

FASCH You're going to have to be far far more specific.

SCHOTT It was Johann Sebastian Bach.

STEIND Bach, did you say? I have something of his. (*Producing a crumpled letter from his rags.*) It's a letter he wrote to his wife. I found it tied to the ankle of the messenger pigeon I was forced to kill and eat in the forest. (*Reading.*) "Leipzig. June, 1722. Darling Anna,"

FASCH Half the organist's wives in Germany are called Anna.

STEIND "The audition begins in the morning. But the outcome is inevitable. Herr Telemann is here, and it is clear in every way, his gait, his bearing, his gorgeous speaking voice, that he will be victorious. I'll be home in no time at all. Yours, Johann Sebastian Bach."

SCHOTT This tells us nothing. What sort of man can write...the music he can write?

KAUF Born Thuringen. 1685. At eight, he lost his mother, and at ten, was orphaned when his father died as well. In 1708, he took employment as Konzertmeister at Weimar, and, upon the death of Weimar's Kappelmeister, Bach sought the post, only to see it offered to Georg Phillip Telemann. He then pursued a position at Cöthen, only to find himself, as a result, thrown into prison for a month by Weimar's Duke. When he was released, and ensconced at Cöthen, his wife, Maria, died. Just as two of their seven children had before her. He has since remarried, and has come to Leipzig, to audition here. He brought with him his collected organ works, the title page of which bears the following

inscription: “To the highest god alone to praise him, *and* to my neighbor, for his self-instruction.”

STEIND        The account is incomplete. (*Beat.*) I only mean: Herr Bach does not know it yet, otherwise occupied as he is, but, tonight: he has had several more sons.

(SCHOTT, FASCH, and then the others all turn out into pools of light. As their letters complete, the others move, fade, vanish, until only FASCH and SCHOTT remain.)

SCHOTT        Leipzig.

FASCH         June. 1722.

SCHOTT        Herr Kuhnau, he began to play again...

FASCH         Anna, it went on all night...

SCHOTT        ...a Prelude, in every key, with no fixed structure whatsoever...

FASCH         (*Overlapping on "structure."*) ...a Fugue, in every key, of almost mathematical perfection...

SCHOTT        (*Overlapping on "mathematical."*) ...he played Concerti in the Italian style which seemed to summon God, a combination I heretofore would have thought impossible, and yet I heard it, unmistakably, with my own ears, along with Suites in the English style, Dances in the French, a Tocatta in D-Minor with an opening melody that seemed to spring fresh from some dark realm of the imagination, and all these were secular, improvisatory, and yet contained every sacredness, ever holy moment I had ever hoped to achieve when writing music of my own, and I thought to myself: never in my life have I been proved so wrong, and never in my life have I felt so happy. Is this what you meant? Is this what I lack? Then I am in good company. For what I heard tonight is the rarest of things...

FASCH         (*Overlapping on "God."*) ...I heard a Passion of St. Matthew, and a cycle of Cantatas sufficient to fill three years of Sundays, and the stories they told lived in the rise and fall of every single note, an achievement I can scarcely fathom, and yet no longer can deny, along with a Passacaglia in C-Minor in which a single theme, through a miracle of formal repetition, opened outward to infinity, and all these were devotional, or rigorous, or both, but rather than being limited they felt limitless, they suggested every yearning beyond articulation I have ever hoped to summon in the music I write myself, and I thought: never have I been so humbled, and never so moved. I will return to you, and to our daughter, a changed man...

GRAUP (*Overlapping on "stories."*) Darmstadt. February 1723. Doctor Schultz I am not, it seems, the second greatest organist in Germany but, rather, the third greatest. And yet, for reasons I cannot explain, this new fate sits with me better than the old one ever did. Therefore, with deep gratitude for all the help you have given me lo these many years, I hereby propose that we discontinue our sessions. Or, if not, that we perhaps begin to spend some of our time together discussing a variety of other issues that sometimes trouble me. Though, of course, if Telemann's name happens to crop up, in an organic fashion, we may discuss him. Should the need arise.

Yours, Johann Christoph Graupner

STEIND (*Overlapping on "second greatest."*) Quedlinberg. March 1728. Father. Please, stop your entreaties. Escaping from your house was not only the wisest decision of my life so far but, I have come to understand, the only decision of my life so far. I have carved out for myself a life here, whittled it, shaped it. I see now that the Steindorff line is inbred, stagnant. Whereas better and better wheels continue to spin themselves out of the forest where I, as a child, was seldom permitted to go. Do not write to me again.

Yours, Johann Martin Steindorff

LENCK (*Overlapping on "house."*) Zwickau. September 1736. Catherina. Glorious news! Pack your belongings as quickly as possible, leave Laucha, and join me here where, at last, I have a title worthy of you, and where we can finally be married. Never again will I have to dress as a woman. Except in the event that you would like me to do so. For some reason. I'm only suggesting that I wouldn't mind too terribly.

Yours, Georg Lenck

KAUF (*Overlapping on "belongings."*) Merseburg. April 1743. Gisela. My serpent. Are any of our children really my own? I ask because, on several recent visits, I have noticed characteristics that suggest other parentage. For example, now that he has come of age, I notice that young Andreas appears to be partly Chinese. Please explain.

Yours, Georg Friedrich Kaufmann

FASCH (*Continuous.*) Zerst. November 1748. Herr Schott. I have received your letter and accept your invitation. And, of course, I would relish the opportunity to visit with *him*. But it may take time to arrange the journey.

SCHOTT      (*Continuous.*) Leipzig. May 1749. I look forward to your arrival. And do come soon, Fasch. After all: he won't wait forever.

FASCH      (*Pause.*) Leipzig. July 1750.

Epilogue: Da Capo

(*The anteroom. FASCH stands here, stooped with age. SCHOTT, as we first saw him, is seated in a chair before the doors.*)

FASCH        Georg Balthasar Schott.

SCHOTT        Johann Friedrich Fasch! You've come at last!

FASCH        I was delighted to receive your invitation! How is the Neuekirche?

SCHOTT        Fine, fine! Though my duties have expanded, somewhat. *He* has been kind enough to place me in charge of the students at the Thomasschule.

FASCH        From the tavern across the street, I thought I could hear *him* playing.

SCHOTT        It only looks like a tavern. Now it's a music shop. But you are correct: he plays every day at this time.

FASCH        The people must consider themselves blessed.

SCHOTT        On the contrary. They consider themselves Rationalists.

FASCH        Yes. A new age is dawning.

SCHOTT        No. It dawned thirty years ago only we didn't notice. One marches boldly forward only to learn, after the fact, that one was facing the wrong direction. People now have little interest in music *or* religion. I do not know what they will call *this* age, but its chief characteristic seems to be a profound lack of Enlightenment.

FASCH        But: *you* listen. You must.

SCHOTT        Oh, yes, but... *My* favorite moments come not *while* he is playing, but just *after*. I feel happiest as his final chords begin to fade to the high stone ceiling. What do you make of that?

FASCH        No doubt the silence that follows seems richer than ordinary silence. Imbued as it is with the profound absence of the sounds you've just heard.

SCHOTT        Yes...yes, and, in it, so much is clearer... every squeak of hinges...every footstep... Such is his mastery, I suppose: he makes even silence... gorgeous.

*(Long pause.)*

SCHOTT I was surprised not to see you at Graupner's funeral.

FASCH Graupner is dead? I received no word.

SCHOTT Oh, it was a small affair. The budget for such things had been greatly sapped by Telemann's funeral, two days earlier. *(Pause.)* I arrived in time to speak with him before he passed. And, on his deathbed, he revealed to me that he had altered his letter from Kuhnau, shifting its key signature from minor to major in order to hide its true meaning. Kuhnau, you see, had demanded that no one replace him at all! That Leipzig remain, after his death, forever without music! And that, as an eternal reminder, an urn containing his ashes be placed upon the silent organ. He even had the urn ready: a gray vase, adorned with a spider's web of cracks, he'd received as a gift, he said, years before. From his only son. He was obviously mad: the man was childless, you see. *(Pause.)* Almost heartbreaking. Isn't it?

FASCH Yes. Almost.

SCHOTT He even vowed that, if attempts were made to replace him, he'd haunt the road to Leipzig, as a vengeful spirit. *(Beat.)* Ridiculous.

FASCH Yes. *(Pause.)* May I go inside?

SCHOTT I insist.

FASCH Do you think he's nearly finished?

SCHOTT No. Oh, no.

FASCH Do you suppose he'd mind if I just stood in the doorway?

SCHOTT *(With deep melancholy.)* I have spent the better part of my life in this doorway. No one has ever minded. *(Pause.)* He will be pleased to see you. In fact, that has only just now become possible. These last few months he has been quite blind but, just this morning, his sight has returned!

*(FASCH, alarmed, opens the door. A simple melody, played on the organ, floats out...)*

FASCH My word!



SCHOTT      Yes, astonishing, isn't it? And at his age.

FASCH        No. Oh no. He's collapsed.

*(...and now, the piece is joined by other instruments: strings, woodwinds, ghost-like...)*

SCHOTT      What are you talking about? Listen to him play!

FASCH        He's not moving. Herr Bach, are you all right? Herr Bach! *Herr Bach!*

*(FASCH disappears inside the doors...while, from every direction, from the very air, more and more instruments join, an entire orchestra, a choir, swelling and swelling...)*

SCHOTT      Fasch, don't you hear that? It's beautiful!

*(FASCH emerges. What he says is nearly inaudible.)*

FASCH        Fetch the doctor. Quickly, go.

SCHOTT      *(To be heard over the music.) What?*

FASCH        *Fetch the doctor! Quickly! Go, now! Go!*

*(FASCH darts inside the doors and disappears.)*

SCHOTT      I'm sorry, my friend, I can't hear you! You'll have to wait for him to finish playing!

*(SCHOTT is alone, listening blissfully, eyes shut, to the music, which builds and builds as the lights fade. He is swallowed by darkness and sound. Fade to black.)*

END OF PLAY