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In a town between the Black Forest and the Swabian Alps, Friedrich Schmidt stood on the threshold of his half-timbered house, pretending to be brave.

From his vantage, he looked across the rooftops of Trossingen toward the castle-like factory looming above the town. Within its walls, a smokestack rose higher than the tallest gable and puffed a white cloud, a beacon against the gray sky.

Father stood behind him in the doorway. “Son, you know the way. We’ve walked it hundreds of times. Remember, you have as much right to be on the street as the next person. Uncle Gunter will be waiting for you at the front gates.”

Friedrich nodded and stood taller. “Don’t worry, Father, I can do it.” He *wanted* to believe his own words: that something as simple as walking to work by himself would be easy, that he

wouldn't need Father's hawk-like presence, shielding him from the frightened, or steering him around the gawkers. Friedrich took a few steps toward the street, then turned to wave.

Father's hair billowed from his head in a gray halo, giving him a wild look. It suited him. He raised his hand in return and smiled at Friedrich, but it wasn't his usual jovial smile; it was half-hearted and worried. Were those tears in his eyes?

Friedrich went back and pulled him into a hug, inhaling his persistent smell of bow rosin and anise lozenges. "I'll be *fine*, Father. It's your first day of retirement and you should enjoy it. Will you join the pigeon feeders?"

Father laughed, holding Friedrich at arm's length. "Heavens no! Do I look like I'm ready for the park bench?"

Friedrich shook his head, happy he'd lightened the mood. "What will you do with your time? I hope you'll think about performing again." Long ago, Father had played cello for the Berlin Philharmonic. But he set aside that life when he married and had children, taking a more practical

job at the factory. Shortly after Friedrich was born, Mother died and Father was left to raise him and his sister, Elisabeth, alone.

“I won’t likely perform with an orchestra,” said Father. “But don’t you worry. I’ll have plenty to keep me busy—my books, my cello students, concerts. And I intend to start a chamber music ensemble.”

“Father, you have the energy of three men.”

“That is a good thing, with your sister coming home today. Elisabeth will fill our house with directives, and I’ll need stamina for that, to be sure. I intend to convince her to take up the piano again, so we can resume our Friday get-togethers, beginning tonight. I miss them.”

Friedrich missed those evenings, too. For as long as he could remember, every Friday after dinner, Uncle Gunter, Father’s younger brother, came for dessert and brought his accordion. Father played cello, Friedrich harmonica, though in truth, cello was his instrument, too. And Elisabeth played piano. Father and Elisabeth would argue about everything from the choice of songs to the order

in which they were played. Friedrich had given up trying to determine whether Elisabeth and Father were opposites in nature or simply alike. Still, those were his happiest memories: the polkas, the folk songs, the spontaneous singing and laughing, even the bickering.

Now Elisabeth would be home from nursing school for three whole months! He couldn't wait for their late-night talks. Or passing a novel back and forth and taking turns reading it out loud. And their Sunday afternoon card games of Binokel around the kitchen table with Father and Uncle Gunter. The past year hadn't been the same without Elisabeth's mothering and bossing and cooking. His mouth watered just thinking about her cooking.

"Do you think she missed us as much as we missed her?" asked Friedrich.

Father smiled. "How could she not?" He pointed Friedrich toward the street and patted his back. "Have a good day at work, son. And don't forget to—"

"I know, Father. Look *up*."