WHAT IN A GOOD CAUSE MEN MAY BOTH DARE AND VENTURE

by

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ABSTRACT

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Utah State University, 2016

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“What in a Good Cause Men May Both Dare and Venture” is a historical short story that features schoolteachers in Munich, Bavaria, during the revolutionary period of 1848. The principle character, Franz Schuler, must decide whether or not to join an illegal teachers union. Simultaneously, he must choose whether or not to stand up against his emotionally abusive father. King Ludwig I, Lola Montez, Karl von Abel, and the revolutionary fervor that bubbled up in several European regions, all function as part of the backdrop of this story. Paired with current struggles educators face in the United States and around the world, “Cause” demonstrates that some social justice issues continually resurface. Every generation, whatever the location, must decide how it will respond to institutionalized injustice—whether in 19th-century Germany or modern America.

(62 Pages)
PUBLIC ABSTRACT

What in a Good Cause Men May Both Dare and Venture

Karen Schwarze

In this thesis, I present a short story in the historical fiction genre. I researched the plight of Bavarian schoolteachers during the 1848 revolution and integrated this historical information into the story. The Cultural Minister at the time, Karl von Abel, had instituted strict measures against schoolteachers. For example, they were forbidden to read certain books (a key element in the story), attend taverns, and meet outside of regulated teachers conferences. Teachers also were denied civil servant status, which meant that no pension was available to them.

In my short story, the main character, Franz Schuler, must decide whether or not to join an illegal teachers union. After he witnesses the march of the burghers—prominent citizens—in protest against Lola Montez—the king’s mistress—and his friend’s near-arrest, he chooses to participate in the union. The union writes petitions to the Bavarian Diet and the king. When the German National Assembly convenes in 1848, they also write petitions to that body in hopes of redress. Franz also must choose how to respond to his father’s domineering behavior. The conflict Franz faces in his professional life mirrors to some degree the one he faces in his family. Ultimately, the National Assembly fails to enact real change and is disbanded. Revolutionaries across Germany are punished by the existing governments who reassert their power. Franz and his friends decide to leave Bavaria: Franz goes to America to prepare a place for his family, and the others go to France.

In this story I do not attempt to give a definitive historical interpretation of how the revolutionary events of 1848-49 affected the schoolteachers of Bavaria. Rather, I offer a glimpse
into the lives of a few schoolteachers whose professional challenges coincide with the revolutionary fervor and suggest how imagined individuals may have dealt with those challenges.
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<td>Ludwig I crowned king of Bavaria at age 39</td>
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<td>1837</td>
<td>Minister of Interior Karl von Abel put into office; institutes strict, conservative measures against the Volksschullehrer (schoolteachers of the lower class)</td>
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<td>October 1846</td>
<td>Lola Montez, soon to be King Ludwig’s mistress, arrives in Munich</td>
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<td>In Munich, burghers—prominent citizens—march in protest, demanding that Ludwig rescind order to shut down the university. They also demand that Lola Montez leave Bavaria.</td>
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CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

In this Critical Introduction, I discuss several aspects of my experience as I wrote “What In a Good Cause Men May Both Dare and Venture” (hereafter “Cause”), a historical fiction piece. Those aspects are: conceiving the story and dealing with craft, writing historical fiction, writing about 19th century German schoolteachers in particular, balancing historical accuracy and artistic license, and conducting research.

The Conception of “Cause” and Challenges It Presented

My ancestors on my father’s side immigrated to America from Germany, Prussia, and Czechoslovakia in the 19th century. My great-great-grandfather, Ernst Schwarze, left Germany in 1860. While I do not know the details of why Ernst Schwarze left Germany, I feel safe in assuming that his reasons were similar to those that prompted other German immigrants to come to America—reasons like economic and political instability. Those conditions were involved in the German Revolution of 1848.

After I made the decision to write a fiction piece for my thesis, I had to decide on what to write about. I discovered that I wanted to get inside the cultural milieu of my ancestors. As I explored this milieu further, the European Revolutions of 1848 surfaced as an intriguing—and, in terms of fiction fodder, relatively untapped—series of events. I learned that little fiction that deals with these events exists in the English language.

Once I decided to write about the 1848 revolutionary events in Germany, I wanted to find an even narrower demographic to work with—some group of people whose interests aligned with what unfolded in 1848. Though it would have been interesting to try to re-create my own
ancestor’s story, I also felt drawn to a specific demographic group whose lives changed through the events of 1848. The group I chose was Bavarian schoolteachers.

Schoolteachers were marginalized in 19th century German society, in terms of social status and pay especially. Historians such as Wilhelm Riehl, Steven R. Welch, Heinrich Busshoff, and others have commented on the role of schoolteachers in the revolution. Opinions vary from that of Riehl, who “labeled the ‘perverse schoolmaster’ as the ‘Mephisto’ and ‘evil demon’ who inspired the peasantry to rise against the established order” (Welch 25), to those similar to that of Heinz-Elmar Tenorth who states “that the teachers ‘while not a central factor in the Revolution certainly cannot be overlooked’ and has insisted that teachers were active not only in matters affecting their own profession but in the broader politics of the liberal movement” (Welch 26).

When choosing a demographic to zero in on with my creative thesis, I chose schoolteachers partly due to my interest in the genre of education protest literature. I also agree with historians who have portrayed these Bavarian teachers as a politically volatile group: they were literate, thoughtful, and consigned to a low echelon in society—a group ripe for frustration (Welch 26, Nipperdey 413-14).

In an early draft, I began the story with my version of an actual conversation between the king and von Abel. I followed that scene with alternating scenes that featured Lola Montez and the king and the schoolteachers. As the story evolved, it became clear that I needed to choose an emphasis. Did I want to focus on Lola Montez and her role in Munich? Should I eliminate a portrayal of the king and his ministers almost entirely and focus on the common people? In the end, I chose to center the story in one schoolteacher’s experience. In the story I mention the major historical figures—the king and Lola Montez—but they are part of the background and do not act as highly visible characters in “Cause.”
One of the first questions I had to address—and one that continually surfaced throughout multiple drafts—was the nature of the main schoolteacher(s). In my first draft, the main character was a woman teacher. After checking the research, however, I discovered that, at least according to Welch’s findings, female teachers were nuns. If I wanted my principle character to be a woman, I’d have to bring in other elements of research, such as nunneries and beliefs and culture of the Catholic church in Germany in the 19th century. I chose to avoid this eventuality by making my schoolteacher a man. There was from the beginning the dynamic of one schoolteacher trying to persuade the protagonist to join the union. For a reason that is still mysterious to me, that aspect of the story never changed. What did change was how the principle schoolteacher was drawn into the union.

The nature of the union evolved throughout the writing process. I knew from the beginning of the drafting process that my teachers would have an “underground” union in which they wrote petitions. One version of the story involved the expansion of the teachers union into a full-fledged revolutionary coup that wanted to take over the government. There were two problems with this idea: First, I had no evidence that the real teachers of 19th century Bavaria had wanted to take over the government, and I wanted to created historical fiction, not an alternate history. Second, it seemed to me that if they carried out a coup someone would have to kill the king, and I did not want my teachers to be murderers.

When deciding on what characters to use and their attributes, I ultimately chose to work with personal material. That is, the Schuler family represents my family dynamics. A domineering wife/mother figure, however, felt inauthentic in 19th century German society, so I reversed Kurt and Caroline Schuler’s roles. I originally grounded Franz in my brother’s personality and Heinrich in my own. Their characters evolved and gained independence from these original outlines, which I think is a natural process in writing fiction. When I started with
past family tension and personalities, I found an emotional energy that complements the professional and national tension Franz faces. Likewise, Franz’s choice to finally defy his father mirrors his decision to join the teachers union and break the law in a more major way than he has in the past.

A challenge I faced pertained to audience and point of view. I wrote my first drafts in a third person omniscient point of view, in the past tense. On the third draft, I chose to change the point of view to first person limited, past tense. I felt that the story “came” easier when I wrote it using this point of view. However, it also meant that I had to consider other factors that hadn’t needed consideration before. Such as: To whom does the main character tell the story, and why? I settled on the rhetorical situation of the main character writing a memoir-like piece to his future children. As I changed the short story to the first-person limited point of view, I had to cut scenes because the narrator would not have witnessed them himself. Anything that he did not witness had to be communicated through his friends or family members. Because of this, his understanding of one particular event—the part of the story in which Johan Weber is almost arrested—is limited, as is the reader’s. I am glad I made the choice to change the point of view, and I would not want to change it back to third person omniscient. That said, there were sacrifices that came with this choice. One of those sacrifices was that I could not include epigraphs at the start of the story because, as my thesis chair explained, they did not work with the rhetorical situation I’d set up.

A lesson I do not think I could stress enough to potential writers of historical fiction is this: Work with a historical location where the spoken language is one you understand. There is no substitute for the ability to read and analyze primary documents. I had to rely on other historians’ interpretations of events and patterns. Ideally, a historical fiction writer delves into the primary documents herself and makes her own conclusions which she then transfers into her
fiction. “Cause” would have benefited from primary document research. Unfortunately—again, as I had to rely on English sources—there are fewer descriptive details (i.e. architecture, clothing) in the piece than I would like there to be, simply because I struggled to find definitive sources that gave me this information. One 18th-century German author proved valuable as I looked for sources to help me recreate this time and place. In “Cause,” I reference works by Friedrich Schiller. According to The Schiller Institute: “[N]o one more effectively united the conception of republican freedom with the principle of poetic beauty, than Friedrich Schiller.” His works include a play called Don Carlos and a book called The Revolt of the Netherlands from which my principle character, Franz Schuler, quotes. I took the title of the story from The Revolt of the United Netherlands. At the suggestion of Dr. Waugh, I used these works to encourage Franz’s transformation from an obedient Bavarian citizen to a rebellious one. In this way, they help move the story forward. Don Carlos and Revolt are texts that schoolteachers and other revolutionaries may have read, texts that may have informed their revolutionary sentiments: Don Carlos, a fictional play, questions the arbitrary authority of kings, and Revolt praises the Netherlands’ rebellion against Spain in the 15th and 16th centuries.

As I worked on my thesis, I learned about not only how to write historical fiction but also how to improve my writing style. In particular, the feedback process allowed me to see flaws in my writing I had not noticed before and gave me a chance to write better prose. Overall, I learned a great deal about the craft of writing fiction in general and historical fiction in particular. In terms of understanding the difficulty of the task and scope of required work, I have solid ground to start from if I choose to write historical fiction again.
Writing Historical Fiction

Two of the questions I dealt with as I wrote this piece are: “How does one write historical fiction? What thought processes inform creating this type of work?” As I reflect on my experience with this thesis project, I turn to professional writers to see how their insights coincide with my experience.

The first challenge I faced involved showing history without presenting a history lesson. Canadian writer Guy Vanderhaeghe explains: “When I’m writing fiction, I don’t attempt to teach or instruct” (Wylie 26). Towards the beginning of the drafting process, I included exposition of historical information, rather than integrating it more seamlessly into the story. While research certainly must inform historical fiction, I learned that it ought not be presented as a kind of history lesson. Historical novelist Persia Woolley writes: “Remember that people want to read about people, not facts. The moment the author’s voice begins to lecture about something, you’ve broken the spell, forfeited the contract and let go of the thread” (103).

Multiple writers of historical fiction, including Vanderhaeghe, articulate the idea that the more “open-ended” a historical event/character’s life is—that is, the fewer concrete, historical facts—the more it lends itself to inclusion in historical fiction. In my case, I found that little has been written in English about individual schoolteachers in Munich during the 1848 revolutionary period; thus, there are significant “gaps” to explore.

Such gaps allow the writer more freedom; simultaneously, they present an additional layer to the challenge of being true to what actually happened. As I worked on this story, I felt a certain degree of responsibility to the truth of these schoolteachers’ situation. As a non-German speaker, I had limited resources available to me—enough to shape an image of what happened, though I keenly felt the handicap of my inability to access primary documents. Though I agree
that gaps allow the writer to imagine what may have happened and thus write her fiction, in my case more access to information would have made my thesis a stronger piece, especially in terms of establishing the setting. Woolley writes: “Probably a good percentage of what you learn [in the research process] will never actually get into print, but the knowledge you’ll gain will add to the depth and dimension of your work” (30). In other words, even if a given fact is not present in the actual text, an immersion in historical material allows the writer, consciously or not, to imbue the text with a sharper authenticity.

Writing About 19th Century German Schoolteachers

My research process began with reading articles by Steven R. Welch, a historian whose work focuses on education in Bavaria. I also read articles he references in his work. Welch provides crucial information about the education system in particular. For other research needs, I turned to other sources. Bruce Seymour’s Lola Montez proved valuable as I worked to understand everyday life in Bavaria and revolutionary tensions faced by King Ludwig I. Various books on German history gave me a broad scope of the revolutionary time period and offered plot ideas. A 1972 TV drama, “The Strauss Family,” set in Vienna in the 19th century, helped me visualize clothing. A host of other sources informed my understanding of the place, time period, and potential characters in the story.

A first step in creating a world for my characters to inhabit involved considering specific events of the time period and place. Karl von Abel served as Cultural Minister to Ludwig I from 1837 to 1847 and instituted measures against schoolteachers, several of which I highlight in “Cause.” One of these measures, a prohibition against assembly, caught my attention. Welch points out that the marginalized schoolteachers wrote petitions to their own Bavarian Diet as well as the Frankfurt Parliament once it was in session. From the beginning of my drafting process, I
knew that a central focus of the story would be an illegal teachers union. The teachers would have a meeting place to write these petitions. The 1848 teachers in Bavaria also had periodicals, an element I bring into the story.

Taverns and beer gardens are, as they were in the 19th century, popular in Bavaria. Kim Carpenter discusses the role taverns played in Germany, specifically commenting on their function as a place of social gathering and beer’s relative nutritional value. For poor folk, beer provided necessary calories. One of von Abel’s measures forbade schoolteachers from meeting in taverns, thus depriving them not only of any potential health benefits of beer but also of the tavern’s social benefits. Setting the teachers’ meeting place initially in a tavern compounds the illegality of their actions.

Mischa Honeck’s *We are the Revolutionists* describes some of the interplay between revolutionary fervor in Europe and the abolitionist movement in America. Specifically, he explains that some “48ers”—revolutionary exiles from Germany—joined the abolitionist movement when they came to America to escape counter-revolutionary measures. This interplay interested me, and I wanted to find a way to introduce it into “Cause.” Additionally, I am drawn to stories of immigration, particularly because my ancestors immigrated from Germany and Czechoslovakia in the late 19th century. My desire to write about the 1848 revolution stems partly from my interest in how that time period may have affected my ancestors’ decision to immigrate.

In several of my drafts, I positioned Heinrich as having already immigrated to Missouri. I chose Missouri because Gottfried Duden, a German traveler and writer, lived there for two years in the 1830s and recommended the state in his book *Report on a Journey to the Western States of North America*. The area he lived in became known as “Duden’s land.” In “Cause,” Franz and Heinrich Schuler have read the book and reference it. When the Schulers finally get to Missouri at the end of the story, Franz mentions slavery and how he has left one scene of conflict for another. We do
not see him get involved with the abolitionist movement, but the end is open-ended enough to suggest that he may get involved in the future. As I wrote the story, it seemed plausible that all of these elements could connect—tension and social injustice in Munich, immigration, and injustice in America.

Right before Lola Montez left Munich in 1848, the burghers did march in protest, as I portray in the story. A group of young university students called themselves the Alemannia and paraded around town with Montez as her fraternity. The king, one of Montez’s lovers, resented this. Other university students also resented the Alemannia because they viewed Montez as a “foreign whore” (Seymour) to whom the Alemannia assigned themselves. Persecution of the Alemannia at the university, mixed with the king’s own desire to be rid of them, culminated in his order in March 1848 that the university would be shut down. It was this that the burghers protested against, along with the presence of Montez, who was essentially at fault for the shutdown and generally despised in Munich. Franz’s observance of the march is a contributing factor to his later conscious decision to join the teachers union.

Historical Accuracy and Artistic License

I decided to make the larger historical events—the burghers’ march, the Frankfurt Parliament—as realistic as I could present them. I set the burghers’ march in March 1848, just as it happened. The dates for the creation and dissolution of the Parliament I present as they happened. I keep aspects of the schoolteachers’ experience grounded in facts: they did meet illegally, they did write petitions, and they did produce periodicals. Many revolutionists did leave the country for America, including some of the Parliament delegates. The things teachers were forbidden to do and the impositions on their rights that Johan mentions—those things are all real. Friedrich Schiller, as I’ve discussed, was a real German author. Though I do not have a list of books teachers could not read, it’s likely that the rebellious works of Schiller would have been on
the list. Many schoolteachers of this period were sons of artisans who did not want to compete in a glutted market, so Franz’s vocational choice as a woodworker’s son makes sense. The individual schoolteachers are entirely fictitious, as are the other members of the Schuler family.

Literature Review: Historical Fiction of 19th-Century Germany

Before I defended my thesis proposal, I performed two searches to attempt to find fiction that takes place in 1848 in Germany that is written in English. I am aware that searching on one university’s database does not constitute an exhaustive examination; however, I believe that the results are still telling. First, I used the search terms “Germany,” “1848,” and “fiction” (separate terms, not as three terms bookended in a single set of quotation marks); there were zero results. When I searched “Germany” and “fiction,” there were 252 results. I examined most of these entries and found that the bulk of the fiction centered on a single time period: post-World War Two. I also performed searches using Google and Goodreads and did not find any fiction written in English that centered around the 1848 revolution in Germany. Again, although those searches were not exhaustive, if the absence of fiction involving the German revolution of 1848 on the Merrill-Crazier database and in my searches is any indication, there existed a “gap” in not only the historical fiction genre as a whole but also in fiction as it relates to this period of German history.

As part of exploring the reasons for these gaps, a brief reference to the German historian Leopold Von Ranke may be helpful. According to Caroline Hoerfferle, Leopold Von Ranke “was probably the most important historian to shape [the] historical profession as it emerged in Europe and the United States in the late 19th century” (Hoefferle, 68). Brent O. Peterson in his article “Historical Novels and the Contents of German History” remarks: “When Leopold von Ranke and the corps of historians that he trained founded the modern discipline of history in the early
nineteenth century, the exclusion of women, workers, and the poor was not just institutional, not just an absence of women and working-class historians; the lives of the great majority of the population were also deemed historically uninteresting” (48). If the exclusions that Peterson alludes to do exist, those exclusions could contribute to an absence of historical fiction involving the working classes—including schoolteachers—in Germany in the mid- to late-19th century. Such exclusions could limit available information about a number of groups, thus limiting sources for historical fiction writers—German and English-speaking alike—to draw from. I have not conducted an exhaustive examination of how von Ranke may have shaped the course of German 1848 historical fiction; I simply offer Peterson’s observation, noting von Ranke’s perspective and influence as a possible contributor to the reasons for this gap.
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Historical Fiction as Genre


**Historical Fiction and Other Fiction**


It was January, the year 1848. I’d been teaching in Munich for about three years. I was twenty-two years old. We weren’t rich, my family and I; Father and my brother Heinrich made wood furniture for a living. It was a respectable enough occupation, though the number of woodworkers in Munich made it difficult to get work at times. But it never held much interest for me. I’d had a leaning toward books for most of my life, so when it came to the point at which I had to decide what I would do for a living, I chose to attend seminary so I could apply my love of knowledge to a profession. The curriculum that I taught my students mostly consisted of religious material with some basic skills to serve as a vehicle for teaching religious principles. For example, at seminary our instructors taught us to teach children their letters so they might read a prayer-book. It was understood that we would do our duty to God and King by thus enforcing the values of a good Bavarian citizen.

For the first year or so of my work, I believed in this. I wanted to serve my God, my king, my fatherland. But then circumstances intervened to change my idea of to what and to whom I owed my allegiance. Events altered my idea of what serving my fellow men meant, what it meant to have self-respect, and what could happen when men joined together in pursuit of higher aims. In this short history, I will attempt to show you the nature of the circumstances that transformed my life and the lives of my family and friends.
One evening at about four o’clock I left the white-plastered brick schoolhouse. The building, about two decades old, stood as a testament to efforts to improve school buildings, though small cracks in the plaster had begun to show. Rain fell from the clouds overhead, in a sky that had been perpetually dark for most of the winter. I yearned for spring and sunshine. The dismal weather mirrored my fatigue after another day of teaching.

“Schuler!”

I recognized the voice immediately. Even now I can see Johan’s blonde hair, spectacles, and wide forehead—features that contrasted sharply with my almost-black hair and narrow, unspectacled face. Jovial by nature and usually up to some mischief, Johan had a way of livening up an evening.

“What are you doing out this way?” I asked.

“Thought I’d take the long way home and see if I wouldn’t run into my old friend,” he said.

I stepped into the street, grinned, and clapped Johan on the back. We walked together. Snow lay in scattered piles. I saw my breath as I exhaled and rubbed my hands together for warmth. Johan and I had attended the same seminary in Munich as young men, and after we took teaching posts we often met for a meal or good conversation. We also saw each other, and met other schoolteachers, at mandated teachers’ conferences.

That evening as we walked, Johan spoke enthusiastically about his recent escapades with certain ladies of Munich. I saw no one else around except for a few passersby. A man in a top hat with a cane spoke out loud to himself as he walked at an even pace through the misty air. A
woman held the hand of a small child whose other hand peeked out from under the end of a coat sleeve. As Johan went on, I blushed and chided him for his indecency, while secretly I wanted him to go on. Once he had me laughing and shaking my head at his exploits, he asked:

“What do you think of teaching?”

He caught me off-guard. “What do you mean, ‘what do I think of teaching’?”

But—rather oddly, I thought—Johan didn’t seem put off. “I mean the working conditions. The salary. What do you think of those things?”

I sensed my friend had plans hidden behind his question. “Why do you want to know?”

“You’d say that our pay and the things we have to do—all the sacristan duties, subjecting ourselves to supervision by the clergy, let alone the business of managing seventy or more children…Would you say you find those things unpleasant?”

I tensed and scanned the street. I watched the few people around us and wondered if they could hear our conversation. To me, what Johan suggested was almost treasonous. Those were the days, you see, when I cared, perhaps over-much, about what people might think.

The man passed us while he walked in the opposite direction across the street. And except for a passing glance, the woman with the child paid no attention to us as she passed on their side. At last I felt safe enough to speak.

I responded: “It doesn’t carry the most esteem, and it’s true that the pay is not very high. It certainly is not a real living. But it’s a decent profession. Better than trying to compete as a new artisan, that’s for sure.”

“So you agree that we are not paid enough.”
“Johan, I know the pay is deplorable. Everyone knows that. But the king is paying off debts. I’d like to get paid more than four hundred and fifty florins a month, of course, but I’m not going to complain about what I’m getting now. And as for the laws…Well, truth be told, I think there are some we can break and get away with it. The books, for instance. Everyone knows that Herr Hofmann hates the rule as much as we do; he’s on our side and will sell us anything we want.” I thought of the books I’d purchased from our bookseller friend in defiance of the list of banned books for teachers. Just recently I’d bought *Don Carlos*, a play by Friedrich Schiller that featured anti-monarchial themes.

Johan glanced at me, obviously unconvinced. “And how long do you think this happy state will last?”

I looked straight ahead and shrugged. “Why shouldn’t it last?”

Johan sighed. “Things are building to a head…What with Lola Montez still around and incurring more ill-will from Munichers everyday, the air of revolution wafting over from France…I wouldn’t be surprised to see the police start to get as jumpy as horses when a storm’s about to break. And when they get jumpy, they’ll crack down on things they’ve winked at in the past.”

I imagined the slim bookseller as he quivered behind his counter. “I hope they won’t do anything to Hofmann. He’s been a good friend to us.”

“Yes, indeed. I’m going to see him soon, in fact.”

“What’s next on your list of books, then?”

Johan looked at me furtively. “Franz,” he began, and then drew near me.
He whispered, “I want to tell you something. But if anyone finds out I said it, I could be arrested. You have to promise me you’ll not tell anyone. Not your family, not your neighbors, not anyone.”

Could I really make such a promise? I certainly didn’t want to compromise my appointment as a schoolteacher. I’d always kept the rules of my profession (well, most of them, except the books) and preferred living that way. At the time, I believed that the best way to live was to keep your head down.

But I very much wanted to know what Johan was up to. And to refuse to listen would be to allow a distance between us, a gap I foresaw and wanted to avoid. I reasoned: If I listen to his plans, that doesn’t mean I have to participate in them.

I said: “I promise, except for Heinrich. But he keeps promises, too. He won’t tell anyone.”

“Fine, then. Listen: The book is called The Revolt of the United Netherlands.” I knew the book—it was another by Schiller, and even more inflammatory than Don Carlos due to its direct reference to revolution. “I have a specific purpose in mind for it. I will read an excerpt from it at a meeting tomorrow night.”

“What meeting?”

Johan kept his voice at a whisper. “There is to be a gathering tomorrow night of teachers. We’re meeting at the Augstiner Keller at seven. I and other teachers have agreed it’s time we had a union, law or no law. I’d like you to be there, Franz. What do you say?”

“I can’t.” The conviction in my voice and the brusque nature of my reply felt almost too certain, even to me. But I had no inclination to change my answer. “Johan, I’ll keep my promise.”
I won’t tell anyone what you’re up to. But I can’t join you. It’s too risky! What if my inspector finds out what I’m doing? What if your inspector finds out? Aren’t you afraid of being dismissed?”

“Of course there’s that possibility. But don’t you see, Franz? We are part of a singular generation. A revolutionary generation. There’s no better time than now to take advantage of the public’s poor opinion of the king. What amounts to a poor opinion of the king could very well translate into a good opinion of us, you see.”

“I’m not so certain. Just because Munichers don’t fawn over their king does not mean they’ll embrace a group of teachers who want better wages.”

Exasperated, Johan replied, “You really think we should just sit around and wait until the king decides that maybe he should take his kingdom’s educators seriously?”

I am ashamed to admit it now: I laughed. I actually laughed in his face. “‘Educators’? My God, Johan, when did you start taking yourself so seriously? By the way you talk you’d think we were university professors. Our job is to teach children about God, with some reading and writing thrown in for good measure. And no, 450 florins is not very good pay. But I’m not going to risk my neck for a few florins more.”

Johan steamed silently for a moment. Finally, he spoke, and I could hear the forced control in his voice. “It isn’t just about the salary, Franz. It’s about our dignity. It’s about our pride. Seventy to a hundred, sometimes more, children in one room. No assistants, no support. Sacristan duties on top of trying to plan a coherent lesson every day. We’re required to collect our own fees from the parents of our charges, many of whom don’t pay half the time. Von Abel’s rules—banned books, the prohibition against taverns, vicious settlement laws that take away our
right to marry, no civil servants status and therefore no pension…You think these aren’t injustices?”

It’s at this point that I must admit something. Every word he spoke stood in truth, mocking my blasé approach toward our working conditions. But I had a very, very good reason to be blasé: Fear dwelt in my heart. Of course I wanted more money for the hard work I did. Of course I hated trying to keep sixty children seated long enough to learn something. I felt it a shame that we didn’t teach children more about the world they lived in. But do not judge me too harshly: I could see no other profession to turn to if my inspector called for my dismissal. Simply put, fear of poverty took precedence over fighting for justice.

I did not tell Johan any of this. If I had, I don’t think he would have taken it as an acceptable reason for my reticence.

Instead, I said: “Johan, I’m sorry, but you’re going to have to find someone else to enlist in this plan of yours. It’s not going to be me.”

He stiffened. “I already have. I’m not the only teacher in this city who’s had enough.”

With that he stormed past me into the growing dark of the evening, turned a corner and vanished.
Standing alone, the moment I am about to show you may not mean much. But perhaps, by seeing this part of the whole, you will begin to understand why later, for the first time, a single thought arose in my consciousness that, finding its twin in my brothers’ eyes, changed the lives of my family.

For all the years we lived in the Munich apartment, Father and Mother slept on one side of the apartment, Heinrich and I in another. Our whole life, Heinrich and I could hear everything our parents said to each other before we fell asleep.

The night I quarreled with Johan, a similarly quiet, similarly momentous conversation occurred between my father and mother. After mother blew out the candle, there was a long silence, followed by a slight scuffing sound, as if someone turned from one side of the body to the other. A clear female voice whispered: “Did you enjoy the soup tonight?”

Silence. “I’ve had better.”

Silence. Then the scuffling sound came again. My mother did not respond to my father’s words.

I stared in the darkness and willed with a fierce ache for my father to not leave those words hanging in the air.
A week later as I swept the floor of the schoolhouse at the end of a long day, an urgent knock sounded at the door. When I opened it, I saw Johan standing at the bottom of the steps. A cold March wind entered as soon as I opened the door, and I saw dirty piles of snow behind him.

“Franz!” he said excitedly, and I could see his breath as he spoke. “They’re marching, they’re marching!”

“Who’s marching?” Then I heard the noise, a rumbling of voices, coming from the Ludwigstrasse.

“Half of Munich! The king’s threatened to shut down the university over the to-do with Lola’s fraternity. But the burghers won’t have it. There’s too much money at risk; can you imagine if all the students and professors of the university left town? They’re shouting in the street: ‘Lola Montez has to go!’”

I stepped outside the door onto the top step and rubbed my arms. “Where are they marching?”

“Out on the Ludwigstrasse. Are you coming?”

I hesitated. “I’m not interested in joining a mob, Johan.”

Johan’s excitement wilted, as if he finally remembered our conversation from a week ago. “Oh.” Then, after he gathered himself, added in a milder tone, “It’s not a mob, Franz. They’re respectable citizens of the city.”

But I had no more desire to involve myself in Johan’s schemes than I had the last time we’d spoken. “I’m sorry. I won’t go.”
Johan shook his head. “You know, Franz, I have always respected your decisions. And I still consider you my friend even though we don’t agree on some things. But let me say this: What’s happening out there right now is history in the making. And I daresay that someday you’re going to look back at this moment and wish you’d chosen to be part of it.” With that he took off past the piles of snow through the streets to the Ludwigstrasse.

I watched as he skirted patches of ice that lay in his path and mused over the difference between us. Johan responded to circumstances around him with urgent action. As for me—prior to that moment, I had almost always acted out of caution.

But something changed that afternoon. Instead of going inside, closing the door, gathering up my things, and going home right away, I lingered on the step. I wondered to myself: Why not go to the demonstration, just to watch? There’s no harm in that. If my priest turns up, I’ll avoid him. But no innocent curiosity kept me on that step: No—even then something stirred in me, something I’d noticed traces of before but had always been stifled by fear. A desire to be part of something that mattered rose up in my heart. My heart pounded, stimulated by a sense of urgency, an urge to follow Johan to the demonstration. I didn’t even know what I’d do afterward: Did this mean I wanted to join the teachers’ union after all?

Not knowing how long this impression would last or what would happen once I arrived at the Ludwigstrasse, I went back into the school and gathered my things. After I locked the door, I left the building and made my own way toward the sounds of people marching.

At least a thousand men—some dressed in burgher regalia, most not—surged in the boulevard and marched toward the palace. They looked fearless as they shouted and avoided frozen puddles. I looked to my left—the way they’d come—and could see only marching men. Members of the group shouted: “Get Lola out of Munich!”
I soon noticed that others also watched the marching throng. People lined the walls of buildings. To my surprise, they represented a mix of classes: Businessmen in fine suits and great coats stood next to artisans in simple trousers and plain coats. These latter men, in turn, leaned against the walls beside vagrants in mismatched articles. Some women stood there, too—mostly of the lower classes, in their simple, practical, long skirts and shawls. But I noticed a few young women who wore the stylish dresses of the upper class. They must have been daughters of the burghers. Their fathers would’ve told them to stay at home, surely would’ve told them, “This is men’s business.” But there they stood. Though the bitterness of mid-winter did not seep into my bones, I still felt surprised that poor Munichers in worn clothing wanted to stand in the late-winter chill.

I heard someone call my name. In a moment Johan came toward me. He looked jubilant.

“It’s marvelous, isn’t it!” he practically had to shout, even this close to me. I nodded, though actually I did not know what, exactly, to make of this demonstration against the king. We watched the procession. It occurred to me that I had never seen members of different classes mixing as openly as they did now. As if reading my mind, Johan grinned.

“When it comes to Montez, there are no differences of opinion.” He spat on the ground, and I knew what he meant: No one, save an ostracized few, cared for Lola Montez; apparently the acrimony toward her that existed among all the classes inspired them to unite on the Ludwigstrasse.

We stood there and watched—and even now, I can still see the look of sheer triumph on Johan’s face—until the throng of marching men passed, leaving the cheering crowd in its wake.
The others had gone—Father to his workshop, Mother to sew at a neighbor’s, Heinrich to work at the Augustiner Keller—the night Johan showed up on my doorstep after he fled for his life.

Not long after the march on the Ludwigstrasse a knock came at my door. When I opened the door, I saw Johan, who stood and panted, bent over with his hands on his knees.

“What…?” I started to ask, but he waved my question away. “Let me in, quick, and shut the door,” he said between gasps for breath. I stepped aside for him to enter and shut the door behind him.

He sat down at the table. I waited for him to catch his breath so he could explain what’d happened. Finally, he began:

“I went to see Herr Hofmann to pick up *The Revolt of the United Netherlands*. I saw Officer Barth walking outside on the street when I left. He looked at me, but didn’t stop me on my way back to my apartment. No more than maybe three-quarters of an hour later he knocked on my door. Before I let him in I hid the book under my bed. It wasn’t the best hiding place, but I couldn’t think of anywhere else in time. He must have bullied Herr Hofmann into giving me up. That’s the only way I can figure he would’ve known I bought a Schiller. And when he came into my apartment he had this small piece of paper that looked like one of Hofmann’s receipts. I asked him what he wanted and he said he’d come to search the place. As soon as he went over to my bed I grabbed my coat and took off. I lost him maybe four blocks later. He can’t run very fast.” Here Johan managed a grin.
I looked at my friend, afraid of what would happen next. If Officer Barth knew my occupation, or had somehow caught up to Johan without my friend’s knowledge, then he could be headed to my apartment at that very moment.

“Do you think…Are you sure you outran him?”

“Of course I’m sure. I’m still as fast as ever.” Johan had beaten me in every race during our seminary days. He took another sip of beer.

His assurances did not convince me so easily. I went to the window and peered outside. Nothing met my view except for the dark, empty street and dim lights from other apartments.

“Well, you’ll stay here for now,” I said, as I tried to sound as if I knew how to take charge in a situation like this. “At least until we decide what to do next. Maybe for a few days until it’s safe to go back to your apartment to get things you need.”

Johan nodded. “Thanks.” Then he added, “I knew I could count on you, Franz.” It seemed to me that my taking him in—risking my security for him, to a degree—perhaps made up for my not joining the teachers’ union.

Just then another knock came at the door. My heart rate, which had only just returned to normal, increased, and I stared at Johan with I’m sure what looked like panic. Johan immediately went to the back of the apartment and rolled himself underneath my bed before pulling a blanket down so no one could see him.

The knock came again. But this time another sound accompanied it that made me breathe deeply in relief.

“Franz! It’s us, Matthias and Conrad!”
I knew those voices. I opened the door and saw Matthias Varrentrap and Conrad Brockman, two other schoolteachers, two friends. They stood on my doorstep with worried looks.

“Is Johan here?” asked Matthias.

“Yes, he is,” I replied. “Come inside, quick, before someone sees you.” Paranoia still gripped me; what if Officer Barth lurked in the darkness?

“Johan, come out, it’s me and Matthias,” said Conrad. Johan came out from underneath my bed. Matthias and Conrad grinned and embraced him when he came near.

“Thank God you’ve not been arrested,” said Matthias. “When you weren’t at the meeting, I knew something had happened. We thought you may have come here because Franz was the only one of our friends who didn’t come to the tavern.” He paused for breath. “I figured it had something to do with the fact that you planned to buy a Schiller beforehand.”

As Johan told them what happened, I stood at the window and looked outside. I couldn’t help but notice the deep relief that pervaded Matthias and Conrad’s features. They were my friends too, from our seminary days, but as I watched them listen to Johan I knew they held a special respect for him. I thought about how it’d been Johan’s idea to organize the teachers into a union, and how when he didn’t show up to their meeting they worried about him. It occurred to me that Johan had their admiration, their love. They trusted him, to the point of risking their occupations for him—to the point of risking arrest, maybe worse.

My copy of *Don Carlos* lay safely nestled under my pillow. I could not help but consider the fact that, weeks ago when I’d purchased it, this very scene might have played out: What if I’d been the one the police came after? What if it were me who ran to the apartment of the first person who came to mind—my best friend Johan? He’d have taken me in. Even if it had been
after we’d quarreled, I’m sure he would have done it. Just like he would have done it for Matthias, or Conrad, or any of the other teachers in Munich.

“You’ll need to hide for a while,” I heard Matthias say. “You can live with me until things settle down and you can go back to your apartment for good.”

Johan nodded his thanks.

“You know,” Conrad began, “Part of me believed it was all a ruse. That they made these big threats but when push came to shove they’d just…I don’t know, laugh and say it was all a game. I told myself, They want teachers more than they want us in jail. If they arrest us, and dismiss us right away…They’re just going to let the children show up to school with no teacher there? I have to admit, until tonight, until Matthias said that something must’ve happened, I didn’t think they’d actually arrest one of us, especially not for such a minor offense.”

“That’s the misunderstanding under which we must not labor,” said Johan. “To the king and the police officers under his thumb, it’s not a minor offense at all. To them, we are the vessels through which political opinions pass to the masses, even if the people with whom we interact most directly with are just children. If they can control us, they imagine, they control the minds of the lower class. We’ve got to really think about this whole matter in the same way they think about it.”

Matthias and Conrad murmured their assent. The three of them sat at the table and, by the light of my candle, discussed plans for the teachers’ union.

Later, once they were gone and my family home and asleep, I sat quietly, for I knew my final decision of whether or not to join them must be made in the solitude of my own heart. I remembered what I’d felt as I watched Johan run towards the Ludwigstrasse. I thought of words
from *The Revolt of the United Netherlands*: “…and give a new and irrefragable example of what in a good cause men may both dare and venture, and what by union they may accomplish.” I asked myself: What, by union, would we accomplish? Johan said we should send petitions to the Diet and start an underground teachers’ newspaper like the one teachers circulated in Nuremberg. But to what end?

I sat in the darkness on my bed. My next move hinged on my answer to this question: Did I believe Johan’s plans would yield results? Did I believe the Bavarian Diet would bother listening to a band of young schoolteachers? And what about losing my job? Teacher gatherings outside mandated conferences, as well as teacher newspapers, were illegal. If my inspector found out about my involvement, I would surely be dismissed.

As I’ve explained, I had fallen into the bad habit of choosing practicality over principle. But that night I had seen my notion of practicality blown to bits, and came to this conclusion: If I could get my ears boxed even when I kept my head down, I may as well raise it.

I may as well fight back.
One morning on a Saturday two weeks after this incident, I settled on my bed to finish *Don Carlos*. The morning became early afternoon, and the play so absorbed me that I did not think about my mother’s absence when my father walked into the apartment. He looked around the room and noticed that no food sat on the kitchen table. He looked at me.

“Where is your mother?”

I froze. I knew—and, at the same time, I didn’t know—what would happen once I gave my answer.

“Well? Where is she?”

“I...I don’t know, Father.”

He looked at me and frowned. He didn’t believe me. Later I learned she had gone out to visit a friend. She spent more and more of her time outside our home. Didn’t my father realize he was the reason she left the house so often, the very reason that no meal waited for him?

Father said nothing and left.

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Over the next several months, I attended meetings with other schoolteachers. After the most recent escapade involving Lola Montez—it was all over Munich how not long after she left for Zurich she slunk back to see the king, who ordered her to leave for her safety—the people of Munich were again in uproar. All sorts of rumors circulated: “She’s still in the city,” “She’s plotting with the king’s enemies to dethrone him,” “The king cut off monetary support; now she is openly whoring in Zurich.” We heard all these rumors, and more besides, as we met at the
Augustiner Keller once or twice a week. We’d put the newspaper into circulation, and we wrote petitions to the king, his cabinet, and the Bavarian Diet. One night, early in May, we met to discuss the paper. Afterwards, Johan had another item of business he could hardly wait to share with the rest of us.

“Gentlemen, so far we have appealed to our countrymen and our government. Since January we have petitioned both for their good will. However, though both the paper and the petitions may have achieved some fashion of good, neither has yet yielded the results we want. There is a third avenue which I think we ought to pursue, and tonight I present it to you for your consideration.” We all listened intently, wondering what plans danced in his mind. Then he continued.

“Have any of you heard of the upcoming National Assembly in Frankfurt?” A few nodded; most of us shook our heads. “The Assembly,” Johan went on to explain, “is a group of delegates from each German state. Professors, lawyers, men of knowledge. They will meet to discuss the fate of the German Confederation. It is my opinion that while we continue to seek redress as we have yet done, this third party of power is worth our attention.”

“You think we should write to the Assembly?” Conrad asked.

“Precisely. There’s talk of the Assembly restructuring the Confederation. If they have that kind of power, why not the power to address the problems inherent in the school system?”

The men murmured and nodded, and Matthias said, “I don’t see why not.”

For the next twenty minutes or so, we discussed this new possibility. I felt inclined: we had nothing to lose. In the end, most of the group found writing the Assembly a worthwhile venture, and some of us took on the direct responsibility of penning the petitions.
After the meeting, Johan and I left together. “I’m quite pleased,” he said. “I hoped they’d take it well.”

“Why shouldn’t they? Another set of eyes—or many sets of eyes—to read about our grievances can only help us.”

“Yes, you’re right.” But by the lamplight, I could see worry on Johan’s face.

“What is it?”

“Mm?”

“What’s wrong?”

He smiled, as if to conceal the emotion he’d just shown. “It’s nothing. Probably a senseless worry.”

“A worry shared is a worry lessened,” I said.

We walked in silence for a few moments. “I’ll tell you, but please don’t tell the others? There are some of them, I think, who might leave the union if they got word of what I’m about to say.”

For such an unflinching leader, a man willing to risk his profession for a cause he believed in—willing to risk arrest, even—Johan still maintained a human vulnerability. In that moment, I felt privileged to be the recipient of that vulnerability.

“I won’t, Johan.”
“All right. It’s just that sometimes I have this…ominous feeling that, when everything is said and done, whatever happens, the fact that our names are on all those petitions will turn to our disadvantage. It’s just a thought, a feeling; it probably doesn’t mean anything.”

He wanted me to say something to confirm this conclusion. I couldn’t think of anything comforting to say, because the words he didn’t say disturbed me.

“You don’t think we’ll win, do you,” I said.

He did not immediately reassure me, only corrected me. “That’s not what I said. I just wonder about…well, who will ultimately see those petitions, is all.”

“But Johan, if our requests are granted, then there won’t be any need to fear who sees those documents.”

Here Johan nodded. His gesture did not convince me that he felt any better. “I know, you’re right. You’re right.”

We walked on, and now worry plagued me. Johan’s fear had not resolved itself: He’d only brought it out and then stuffed it back inside himself.

But I did not press it. Perhaps, like Johan, I felt that if I ignored the possibility of failure it wouldn’t exist. Or that whether failure loomed or not held no importance: We had already plunged into the morass. We would move forward or sink.
One rare evening during the summer, neither Heinrich nor I had obligations to attend to. He spent most of his time at the Augustiner Keller or working wood. I’d noticed that, even when not at work, my brother found reasons to be away from the apartment. I suspected he didn’t want to be around our father more than he had to. That’s how I felt, too.

With the heat of July, the inside of the apartment grew uncomfortable. We sat on the front stoop as the sun set.

“You’re quiet tonight, Heinrich. What is on your mind?”

“I’m not sure I should say just yet. It’s…It’s one of those things that I don’t know when or if it will happen. Some things are better left unsaid until it’s certain, you know?”

“Is it a woman?”

Heinrich smiled. “No, nothing like that.”

“What is it, then?”

“Well, it’s just that I have been thinking…of going to America.”

He had never mentioned such a thing before. I did not speak at first. Finally I said, “America?! Heinrich, what—”

“Like I said, I don’t know if it will happen. I don’t yet have a plan.”

“But…Why…?”

“Don’t be so shocked, Franz; it’s not as if I’m the first of your acquaintances to leave.”

He seemed amused by my surprise.
“No…But…Passage to America is not cheap.”

“I know that. Why do you think I picked up more work and have nothing to show for it?”

“So…” I began, as I attempted to understand that my brother had thoughts of leaving Bavaria, “You have been saving money, just in case you decide to go?”

“Yes, that about sums it up.”

I stared out at the street and watched children run up and down the road before us, the boys in short trousers and the girls in thin dresses. Their shrieks of delight reverberated between the apartment buildings. For a few brief moments, I thought, those children, like my own students, can forego the decisions we adults must make.

“They say you can get land for cheap in Duden’s land,” Heinrich said, referring to Missouri where the German Gottfried Duden had lived and farmed for two years. “You know what he says in his book? He says: ‘One has complete freedom of choice…One can roam through beautiful nature for hundreds of miles.’ What would that be like, Franz? To not have to wake up everyday and sit on a carpenter’s stool for hours? To not have to serve beer in a smoky tavern for the rest of your life? Freedom, Franz—freedom to work the land, and plenty of land to work. I’ve heard there are whole communities of Germans in Missouri. A new start, Franz…”

While Heinrich spoke, a thought wrung my heart: I imagined Heinrich on a ship headed for America, myself on a dock with my eyes strained on him until the last…I saw myself as I made the journey home to Munich, alone…

“Don’t you ever leave without me, Heinrich,” I said, with more fervency than I think I’d ever said anything to him before. In a more pleading tone, I added, “Please don’t leave me.”
Heinrich looked startled; apparently he hadn’t expected this sort of reaction from me. “All right, I won’t,” he said, bemused. Then, after a moment’s pause: “You know, it seemed to me that you have other friends now, other people you spend your time with. I don’t mean to say that I feel left behind; I have my own friends too, it’s all right. I just mean that I assumed that, well…”

I looked at him and waited.

“That you don’t need me anymore, I guess. You’re in a union now; you’re a man. Not so much like a little brother anymore.”

“Heinrich,” I said, “I am in a union, and yes, I do have friends. But you’re my brother, my blood. You and I... We’ve both seen things that those others haven’t, and that means we know each other better than anyone else does. So if you go to America, I go too, because you see my whole self, and I see yours.”

Heinrich nodded. After that evening, neither of us mentioned emigration again until a year later, after the end of two eras: the end of our father’s cruelty to our mother, and the end of our hope for the teachers’ union.

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By September, our newspaper had raised conversation in Munich about the plight of the schoolteachers. Now, in addition to the talk of France and revolution, snippets of conversations about the kingdom’s schoolteachers spread in the city’s taverns and streets.

We’d not put our names in the newspaper. However, we knew we were not above being searched or arrested on a police officer’s whim. And while political storms brewed, another storm
would soon break—a storm that’d been brewing within the walls of my apartment, within my blood, and within my brother’s blood.

On a comfortably warm evening in September all of us—Father, Mother, Heinrich and I—sat down to eat. As usual, silence prevailed at the table.

After he’d sampled a few bites of the cooked potatoes, my father said loudly, “My God, woman, they make these better at the Augustiner.” Father treated Mother like a servant, not like a lover. Almost everything he said to her carried this tenor.

Mother, never one to defend herself, said nothing. When my brother and I were younger, she would try to placate Father. Fifteen years earlier, she would have said something like: “I’m sorry, dear. It will be better next time, I promise.” As time wore on, her attempts grew farther apart, until she simply refused to speak most of the time. When Father said something unkind to Mother, Heinrich and I had never stood up in her defense.

But that night I did something different. Maybe the talk—of liberties, of better wages, of more respect—I’d heard at the teachers’ meetings struck at something inside my soul. Maybe I had looked at my own plight long enough to see that other injustices surrounded me. And perhaps I felt that finally the time had come for me to set aside fears and rules about patriarchal respect. Just as the king, his ministers and policemen had no right to abuse us teachers simply by virtue of their authority, neither did my father have the right to abuse my mother. I’d seen enough, and the night had come that I wouldn’t stand for it any longer.

“Don’t you talk to my mother that way! You have been a beast long enough!” The words that poured from me felt instinctual, as if they had waited inside for years.
Father, for the first time I could remember, did not seem to know what to say. He stared at me. Heinrich looked at me with some amazement. Mother lowered her eyes.

“What did you say?” said my father.

“I said, ‘Don’t talk to her that way.’”

My father got out of his chair, took me by the shirt collar, and pushed me against the wall opposite the table. He growled, “What did you say, boy?”

It was here my mother spoke—my mother, who’d resigned herself to a near-complete silence for so long that her voice startled me. “Kurt, please, don’t!”

My father ignored her and kept his hand clutched on my shirt collar. He pushed me harder against the wall. The back of my head throbbed in pain. The fabric of my shirt felt tight around my neck; would my father strangle me?

Then my brother rose, pushed my father away from me, and hit him in the face. The next moment my father lay on the floor. His hands went immediately to his broken nose. Blood spilled from his face onto the floor. Heinrich looked surprised for a moment; he had never punched anyone, and he certainly had never laid hands on our father.

In the next moment, we exchanged a glance that seemed to communicate everything either of us needed to know. For the first time, a thought whispered in both our minds: the thought that, together, we could stop our father. We could fight back.

We each took our father by the arm, pushed him into a chair, and stood over him.

My brother spoke. “You will leave this apartment,” he said, “and never come back.”
My father’s hands, which had miserably tried to cover his bleeding nose, now lowered. I’m sure he felt surprised to see that his grown sons, finally, had realized that they could easily overpower him if they wanted to.

“You can’t make me leave,” he said in a low voice. “This is my apartment.”

“Not anymore it isn’t,” returned Heinrich. “It’s the two of us against you, and we won’t let you stay.”

My father, who still bled profusely, rose as if to physically challenge him. But instead he said, “You need me. You can’t pay the rent here on your own.”

“Actually, we can,” Heinrich replied. “We don’t need your money.”

Mother sobbed quietly. Father said, “She’s my wife before she’s your mother.”

“And she’s a human being before she’s your wife,” I said.

Father’s eyes narrowed. After he looked at my brother and me again, he silently walked to his drawers and picked up the leather bag he sometimes carried tools in. For the next minute, he stuffed shirts and a belt into the bag, all in a complete silence. Then he took some bread from a cupboard and threw on his coat. Finally, he picked up a locked box and carried it in his left hand. He shook the box so we could hear how the coinage rattled inside.

Without a word or so much as a glance at Mother, our father left the apartment.

Heinrich and I had what we needed that night: enough physical force and enough will. Although we knew we did the right thing, this night pained both of us: You see, though I am fairly sure our father did not love us, we still loved him, however slightly. That is a weakness he could have turned to his advantage; he could have used it to weaken our will.
But perhaps he did not know we loved him. As I’ve thought about this event in the days and years that followed it, I have also considered the possibility that Father had simply stopped understanding human love and so did not recognize it in his sons, or, for that matter, his wife. Perhaps such a dismissal encouraged him to stop loving his family. Please don’t misunderstand me—I do not try to make excuses for my father’s behavior, but only try to make sense of it, if any sense can be made.

Truth is a capricious possession. My brother’s truth, my truth, my father’s truth…Were we not all right in our own minds?
Though we never received an official reply from the Assembly, we schoolteachers worked in faith all that year and into the next. We believed that our words carried the weight of all the frustration, poverty, and emotional stress we’d endured. We learned that not only ourselves but other teachers from all over Bavaria sent petitions to the parliament, a fact that added to our store of hope. So many voices spoke out—how could the delegates ignore our plight? Our own king, cabinet, and Diet had ignored our petitions; by the time the spring came in 1849, all our hopes rested in the Assembly.

After Father left, I wanted to take up extra work to help support myself and my family. But Heinrich insisted that I continue attending the teachers’ meetings. Mother took on a noticeable change. She seemed more at peace than ever before. But it would take years before her self-confidence fully returned, a recovery aided by the fresh air of Missouri and, I believe, the open space of the land.

In May of 1849, just a little more than a year after we’d decided to enlist the Assembly in our cause, I received a letter from a schoolteacher in Nuremburg. He was the same teacher who had provided Johan with the newspaper he’d shown us at meetings. As a representative of the Munich teachers’ union, I had written Herr Mann regarding the Assembly proceedings. He lived closer to Frankfurt than we did. He corresponded fastidiously, so sometimes we read news from his letters a day before we read it in the papers.

That day, that letter, contained the result of all our labors.

I wanted so badly to open it then and there, but a stronger desire to open it with the others won out. I felt so sure it contained good news—it’d been a year since we’d first sent our petitions to the Assembly; surely by now they could tell us how they’d help our cause.
I ran to Matthias’ apartment. Johan lived there still, as well. Even my best intentions wouldn’t wait till the next night’s meeting. I knocked hard when I arrived at the apartment.

“Who is it?” asked Johan.

“Me, Franz,” I replied. When Johan opened the door I saw Matthias and Conrad seated at the table.

“News from Mann,” I said, as I sat down and tried to catch my breath. My friends waited in silence as I ripped open the envelope. Their eyes fixed on me as I started to read:

“‘Dear Friends,” I began, “‘I expect you have already heard the news of the…’” I saw the next words on the page, but I did not want to read them aloud.

“‘…the dissolution of the National Assembly.’”

My friends said nothing. “‘The consequences of the failure of the Assembly…’” I paused to gather myself…“‘cannot be overstated. We expect that the kings will reassert power as before. Some delegates have said they will flee Germany, for they have been marked as…as revolutionaries.’

“‘We gravely suspect that the lowly schoolteachers will be likewise branded as rebels and subject to the mercy of the king.’” By this point I felt no desire to continue and so handed the letter to Johan. I buried my face in my hands.

“‘Some among us,’” Johan read on as his voice trembled, “‘have also decided to flee our beloved fatherland. We think this a wise course for any who wish to certainly avoid the punishment accompanying their…their threat to the monarchy. God be with you.’ Signed, Rudolph Mann, Nuremburg, Seventh of June, Eighteen Hundred and Forty-Nine.”
We sat in silence. Matthias slumped in his chair. “All our work. All our plans. All our careful secrecy. All for nothing.” I wanted the ability to disagree but could not find it in myself.

“I thought it would work,” Conrad said. “I thought all of it would work.”

Johan looked pale. I wondered what thoughts plagued him, until I realized I knew what they were: he’d voiced them to me months ago. As if he knew that I remembered, he looked me in the eyes.

“They are going to arrest us.”

Silence. Then Conrad spoke. “Maybe…Maybe they won’t find out we were involved.”

Johan shook his head, and then lowered it into his hands as he spoke. “Our names are on those petitions. On every single one that came from Munich. On every petition to the Diet, which they can use to cross-check our names. Unless those delegates burn their copies as a matter of prudence, which doesn’t seem likely considering their apparent ineptitude, the king has all the evidence he needs.”

More silence. Then, Conrad, again: “So, is that it? Do we just resign ourselves to defeat?”

“The Assembly was our last chance,” answered Matthias. “Is there really anything else you can think of we haven’t tried?”

Conrad didn’t respond. Now we all stared at our hands, or at the opposite wall. Anywhere but at each other.

“Well, what will we do?” said Johan, finally, as he stood up, just as I’d hoped he’d do. Johan, whose energy had never failed us. Johan who, since taking upon himself the role of our
leader, wanted so badly to fulfill it properly. “We can’t just sit here. We’ve got to decide what we’ll do next—if we’ll stay and continue to teach until we’re arrested, or go into hiding, or—”

“Johan,” Matthias interrupted, “I think we should wait a day or two until the full story comes in the papers. I don’t doubt for a minute that Mann tells us truth; there just is some information that perhaps he doesn’t have.”

“It is a very short letter,” Conrad added weakly.

I had not yet spoken since handing the letter to Johan. They all looked at me. “What do you think, Franz?” Johan asked.

I nodded wearily. “Yes. Let’s wait till the papers come. Then we’ll decide what to do.”

A few days later, word of the end of the Assembly spread by way of the newspapers. We heard of arrests of some of the assembly delegates. When it became clear that arrest was an actual threat, I spoke with my family about what I should do. Seated around the table one evening, we had the following conversation:

“We schoolteachers have to make a decision, and quickly. Some have resolved to take their families and go elsewhere in Europe. Others will leave their families and go into hiding…Johan thinks we can find safety in France. I will have to leave you two, but it’s the only way out I can see.”

“When will you come back?” Mother asked.

“I…I don’t know,” I replied. “Things would have to calm down…I don’t know how long it will take for the king to finish making arrests and releasing teachers from their positions.”
Since that conversation with Johan in which he confided in me his fears, I’d secretly wondered if, in the end, I would have to be separated from my family. Now, to protect myself and then, this separation loomed as a certainty, no longer a possibility.

My mother and Heinrich exchanged glances, which seemed to prompt Heinrich to speak.

“We can’t be separated,” Heinrich said. “We are a family. It won’t end like this.”

“What can you do, Heinrich?” I asked. “I’m sure that, sooner or later, I’ll be arrested if I stay here. You shouldn’t give up your work here just to come to France. Maybe in a few years…” But truthfully, I did not know how long it would take for the king’s anger to subside. I did not know if I would ever come back.

“I don’t mean France. I mean America. There’s enough money now for one of us to go, and enough to buy some land.”

The thought of trying to get to America had crossed my mind, as others implicated in treachery against the king also planned to emigrate there. But I’d known I didn’t have enough money for the passage, so I’d decided to go to France with the others. That much I could afford. “But Heinrich, that’s your money. You’ve worked to save it.”

“Mother and I have talked it over. Don’t think you’re the only one who knew that your involvement with the teachers’ union could lead to this. I’ve figured for a while now that one of us would go to America first to get things settled, and more and more I’ve thought that person ought to be you. You can buy a farm and send money our way as it comes. And I still have my job.”

“And I can work for the textile factory,” added Mother. “They let women bring home work.”
Heinrich nodded. “It will take a few years, certainly. But between our work here and you sending what you can, we can all be together in America eventually.”

I stared at my family. It had never occurred to me that they would have made plans of their own in case my illegal activities made me leave Munich. “I told you that we would go to America together,” I said as I looked at Heinrich. “And that is still where I stand.”

“But you can run off to France without us?” said Mother.

“I…that’s different. That is necessary.”

“If it’s necessary for you to leave Munich, then you may as well go to America. In the end that will serve us all well, don’t you see? If we can’t all go together, one of us would need to go alone anyway; why does it matter if it’s me or you?” said Heinrich.

“Because it’s your money,” I said stubbornly.

“Yes, and since it is my money, I can tell you to take it.”

I didn’t know what to say; I could not think of any other way to deter them. I stared down at the table, and I started to cry; whether from the thought of leaving my family or amazement at Heinrich’s generosity, I did not know.

“All right,” I said quietly. “I’ll go.”

~

The next evening I went to Johan’s apartment. I did not think he would be angry with me for my decision, but all the same, I did not like that I would leave my friends. I’d once told Heinrich that he knew me better than anyone else, and that was true. But if there was anyone else I’d consider my closest friend, it was Johan.
I found him putting clothes in a leather case. It would be easy enough for him to pack: he didn’t have very much. When I told him about Heinrich’s decision and my acceptance of the offer to go to America, he nodded. “I understand,” he said. “It makes sense for you to go.” Still, I could tell that he was unhappy at the thought of our separation.

“Here, let me help you pack,” I said, boxing a few of his books. He didn’t object. We worked in silence for a few minutes, a silence that made the impending separation seem just slightly farther off.

An impulse took me. “Johan, do you think you have enough—”

“No.” He shook his head. “I’ve already thought of that. Even with Matthias sharing the cost of rent with me these past months, I don’t have enough money to pay for passage. We’ll be safe in France, me and the others.”

I nodded. And then, tears came from my eyes. I wiped them on my sleeve.

“Then…What will you all do there?” I asked, trying to control my voice.

Johan’s movements slowed until they stopped. He looked at me. “I…I don’t know, Franz. I think we will try to find teaching positions. Or we’ll work at taverns. Or as farmhands.”

“You don’t know how to farm.”

“Well, neither do you, but you’re going off to America to make your living at it,” he said as he tried to smile.

I smiled weakly, too. After a pause I said: “Johan, are you sure? You don’t have anyone who could help you pay?” Oh, how I wished in that moment I’d bought fewer books, or no books
at all, or that I’d eaten less, or sacrificed the teacher meetings so I could work, if it’d meant Johan would have enough money for passage.

But I could not wish back the time. Not for all my love for my friend.

Johan looked me in the eyes. “Franz, believe me, if there was a way I could to go America with you and your family, I’d do it.” After a pause, he went on. “So, where exactly will you live?”

I told him about Duden’s land, about the place where all you could see for miles was land, like an endless, waterless sea.

It would be the last time I saw Johan Weber. He and Conrad and Matthias left two days later for Paris. I’ve written to various inns in Paris asking for information about them. I’ve not heard back. By now I’ve given up hope of ever hearing from my old friends.

~

Before my family and I left Munich, I knew I needed to make one more visit, this one with my brother.

We knew Father had gone to stay with his sister, our aunt Teresa, and her husband in another part of the city. Teresa answered the door when we arrived and invited us inside.

When we asked after our father, she said: “He left us about a week ago. We think he’s gone to Freising.”

Heinrich and I looked at each other. “Why would he leave? That’s too far for him to travel back to work at the shop,” I said.
“That’s just it. He told us about...about how you all fought. It seemed he had no desire to stay in Munich after that. Something came...unhinged in him. He got drunk almost every night. It’s as if he...as if he didn’t know how to live anymore.”

She must have assumed something from the looks on our faces, because she added: “I think you boys did the right thing. Kurt...He should not have treated your mother that way.”

When Heinrich and I returned home, we agreed: We’d thought we’d go home with our father’s angry words on our backs. At least part of me imagined some sort of reconciliation, even a grudging one, would have happened. Neither of us expected we’d go home empty-handed.

Later, Heinrich and I wrote to Teresa and Ernst to ask if they’d heard any more about our father. They always replied that they hadn’t. It has been six years now, and Father has never written us. We can only surmise that he has no desire to speak to or see us. We do not expect to greet him again in this life.

~

After a blessedly safe sea voyage, I settled in Duden’s land.

I do not think I can adequately convey to you the delight the quiet mornings give me. Some mornings I stop my wood-chopping to stare at the field. There is one thing, I think, that will not cease to startle me: the naked vastness, the unashamed lack of what we might call civilization. In Munich, it seemed, every patch of grass was spoken for. I imagine some record keeper carefully recording the use and regulation of every inch...Here the land is idle and sits casually, inviting me to enjoy it as it simply exists.

But I do not know for how long the peace will last. It turns out that Europe is not the only place where so-called “civilized” men oppress one another. Slavery, I’ve decided, is a wound in
this nation’s very flesh, and I fear that it will not heal—if it can indeed be healed—until a
recompense is paid. I sense the time of that atonement draws near as politicians and citizens take
the matter in their hands as they see fit. There are rumors of secession, of war…Who knows but
that time will prove I’ve left one scene of struggle for another?

“That here, by united men, good may be accomplished…”

May God grant that good be accomplished here.

THE END