

The professor arrives at the University of Berne late on Monday afternoon and immediately visits M.Hempel, the head of the Literature department. Hempel looks at him with obvious distaste, stares at his watch before tapping the glass as if to reassure himself that it is not incorrect, and raises a questioning eyebrow.

'My apologies, Herr Director,' says the professor, offering an apologetic bow. 'My train was delayed outside Basel. A problem with the tracks, we were told. I had hoped to arrive in time for classes this morning.'

'I would prefer if you did not refer to me by that name,' he replies. 'Monsieur Hempel is perfectly fine. *Herr Director* is a little, how shall I put this, Aryan for my tastes.'

The professor offers a second bow and decides against a second apology. He's tired, the journey from Berlin took almost twice as long as it should have, and he was forced to sit in a carriage with three young soldiers, each of whom was noisier than the last.

'You requested single accomodation on campus, Professor?' asks Hempel.

'Yes.'

'But the band on your finger... Your wife, she will not be joining you?'

The professor shakes his head and feels heartsick at the memory of the woman he has left behind in Berlin. They married young and in love, a few years after the Great War ended. In recent years, politics has divided them. He no longer feels that he knows who she is.

'She has chosen to stay in Germany,' he replies. 'We have a son. A soldier. She wants to be near him.'

'And you do not?' asks the director.

The professor hesitates for only a moment. 'No,' he says.

The two men stare at each other silently, one predisposed towards dislike, the other determined to vanquish that emotion.

'Your speciality is Proust, yes?' asks M.Hempel and the professor nods eagerly.

'Yes, Monsieur,' he replies. 'I shall also teach Flaubert's novels, the poetry of Rilke, the -'

'Not Rilke, I think,' interrupts the director, shaking his head.

'No?'

'There are others. Apollinaire, perhaps. Baudelaire, even. But not Rilke.'

The professor bites his tongue but says nothing. So this is how it is going to be, he decides. He notices a photograph in a frame on M.Hempel's desk and narrows his eyes to focus on the faces. There are two figures standing next to each, smiling. One is the director himself. The other is much younger, quite handsome. 'Your son?' he asks and the director looks towards the photograph, surprised by the question.

'Yes, my son,' he replies, his voice betraying unnecessary offence and turning the frame a little so it is invisible to the man standing opposite him. The professor looks out the window where he can see the young men emerging from the classrooms and study-halls below. They are laughing and talking; they have no cares in the world. They have no idea, he thinks, of what is on the horizon.