

CHAPTER FOUR

As things turned out, Allegra and Andrei did not see each other that morning. She rose early, uncomfortably aware that there had not been as much of the currywurst as there had seemed at the time, and breakfasted early before going to the first of her classes; he, not surprisingly and not for the first time, overslept, and trailed into the dining hall when all but he had fled, to consume brown bread, cold ham and some wilted salad under the resentful gaze of the attendants who were waiting to clear away. Consequently, he missed his first lesson, which was the only one he shared with Allegra that day, and went to the next one with his head full of a new idea for the development of the second movement of his concerto, and Allegra and the mystery of her absence temporarily shelved.

Allegra, meanwhile, as she practised, was also grappling with a new thought, but not by any means a comfortable one; suppose this thing, whatever it was, that she had pledged herself to avert, was to take place not in Vienna but elsewhere? There were several Orchestra towns within a day or two's sustained ride of Vienna—Boston, Madrid, Reykjavik, London, Moscow—the message could relate to something happening in one of those, or even further away, in Berlin, Chicago or Leningrad, perhaps. Six months began to seem hardly long enough.

Allegra made an elementary mistake, drawing a concerned glance from Frederica, and shook her head angrily. There was no point in borrowing trouble. She would assume that the thing was going to be here till she found some reason to think otherwise.

"Flicka," she said suddenly, "do you know if they're putting on anything special for St. Richard's day?"

"What, here?" Frederica frowned. "That's next May. Are we planning our holidays early?"

"It was just something I heard," Allegra said casually. "Never mind."

"I could ask Yevgeny." Allegra knew her Frederica. Calculated disinterest piqued her curiosity every time. "His uncle works in the Programme Office. I'm seeing him next weekend. I could ask him then."

"I'm just being nosy really," Allegra said. "You needn't if it's any trouble."

"No trouble at all," Frederica said. "It will give us something else to talk about. Yevgeny's conversation grows somewhat monotonous whenever we are alone together."

Allegra smiled gratefully and set her bow to the strings once again. She had taken a first step.

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Inspector Fischer glanced at the body on the slab.

"What have we got?" she said shortly.

"Name," the sergeant said, "Otto Cravi. Age, twenty-six. Old enough to know better."

Fischer stared at him stonily. The sergeant cleared his throat.

"Occupation, assistant to Bernardi the drum maker. Address, Amatistrasse forty-nine. Cause of death, knife wound in the back. Time of death, last night between six and eight o'clock. Location..."

"Yes, sergeant, I know that bit," Fischer interrupted. "Where's the—? Oh, there you are, Gottfried." The surgeon, squat, scruffy and chin-bearded, had just emerged from the washroom. "The wound in the back," Fischer said. "Would death have been instantaneous?"

"Well now," the surgeon said, rubbing his nose, "now you're asking me, aren't you?"

Fischer waited.

"No, I'd say almost certainly not," Gottfried said. "The blade missed most of the vital organs. Punctured one lung, but not badly. Death would have been due to a combination of loss of blood and internal bleeding. Oh no, I would say it would have taken some time, several minutes at least, if not longer."

"Done in a hurry, perhaps?" the sergeant ventured.

"Done very badly, in any case," Fischer mused. "I wonder...he was mixed up with the Music Must Be Free crowd, you said."

"He's been seen at a couple of meetings, inspector."

Fischer showed her teeth in a grim smile. "So have I, sergeant, in my time. You'd be surprised. So. Quiet young Artisan goes to a couple of meetings. Is then found stabbed on the edge of the Singers' Quarter...who found him? You did say."

The sergeant produced his notebook. "An Allegra Marques. Student cellist. Lives at Paganini Hall, of course. Claims she got lost. Also says she went through the alley a few minutes before and he wasn't there then."

"But he died in the alley," Fischer said. "We know that from the blood. So he must have been stabbed just minutes before she found him. And *you* say," she swung round on the doctor, "that he would have taken at least that long to die...but *she* says," her finger stabbed at the sergeant's notebook, "that he was stone dead when she fell over him. Something doesn't resolve to the tonic here, sergeant."

"You think he gave her something? Or told her something?"

"Keep an eye on her for now," the inspector directed. "Question her friends, her teachers...but carefully. If she thinks we're after her she might get rid of it, if there is an it. I don't know," she snapped before the sergeant could utter the question. "I don't *know*. But these Godless revolutionaries bother me. It's past time we cleaned them out of this town and all the others. Especially if they take to killing their own and leaving them around in the street. Litter problem's bad enough as it is."

"Yes, inspector," the sergeant said woodenly.

"Do you drink, sergeant?"

"No, inspector."

"God of Music, why not? I would if I only could. Well, never mind. Let's get out of this hole and start things moving. Thank you, Herr Doktor," Fischer threw over her shoulder at Gottfried, who bowed and watched them ascend the dank stone steps.

He waited till their footsteps had dwindled into silence, and then brought out the object he had found under the dead man's tongue. It was a small silver medallion. On one side, stamped in low relief, it showed a treble clef, crossed by a series of vertical bars, with a broad diagonal stripe across it; the reverse bore the words MUSIC MUST BE

FREE.

The surgeon removed his own medallion from his pocket and compared the two. They seemed identical. Then he put both medallions back into his pocket and went to wash his hands once more.

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The square in front of the Grand Hall of Vienna, white-paved and ringed with wooden benches, was not populous at this hour of the morning; most people were either at their work, their practice, or their devotions. A few strollers or sitters were to be seen, mostly retired elderly couples taking the air, or parents with children too young for school, taking a break from shopping to rest their feet and pass the time of day with friends. It was a crisp, clear day; the snow of last night had been barely more than a dusting, and even the watery sun of winter was disposing of it in all but the deepest shadows. Those traders who had to deal on a daily basis with farmers eyed the distant, and in point of fact almost invisible, horizon, tested the wind with their fingers, and muttered darkly of more to come; travellers from Boston and points north spoke of five-foot drifts and worse.

One of the benches that ringed the square was occupied by a woman with luxuriant, very black hair, wrapped up warmly in furs against the chill. A man walked up and sat next to her, and for a while they contemplated the ornate façade of the Grand Hall in silence.

"It's true, then," the woman said, in a distinctively husky voice.

"Oh yes," her companion confirmed. "No doubt about it."

"Who did it?"

"The gendarmes," Doktor Gottfried said, with relish, "are baffled."

"It was not one of us," the woman said flatly, and the man looked surprised.

"But I assumed—"

"You thought Otto was going to betray us."

"Well, yes."

"I think so too," the woman confirmed, "and the Conductor took that passage just a little too fast, I believe," she added, as an old man with a small white dog on a lead

shambled by. "The intonation of the clarinets was definitely a little rough." She lowered her voice again. "But Dmitri gave no orders that he be silenced, and I do not believe any one of us would take such an action without orders."

The surgeon thought for a moment, looking at his hands. "An agent of the gendarmes themselves, perhaps, then?" he said. "Operating unknown to the local forces, on secret orders from—"

"You read too many novels, Gottfried," the woman said, sharply but not without humour. "No, this must be something else. Perhaps he was simply killed because he got in someone's way, or looked at someone in an offensive manner."

"Well now, that would be highly improbable, would it not?"

"Look around you, man," the woman said. "The improbable happens every day here."

"Then," this with an air of triumph, "what is so improbable about the idea that the Examining Board in Philharmonia should have a corps of secret agents whose very existence is unknown to the local gendarmerie? Tell me that, Natalia?"

Natalia threw up her hands. "There is no arguing with you, Gottfried!"

"Well," said Gottfried, satisfied, "I for one shall be for keeping my eyes and ears open and locking my doors at night."

"So shall we all," Natalia retorted. "Random or not, this murder strikes at our very heart. We are pledged to shun violence in the cause; now, when it becomes known that Otto was one of us, we shall be branded murderers ourselves."

"I have more news," said Gottfried, with a malicious glint in his eye, and relayed a portion of the conversation upon which he had shamelessly eavesdropped in the mortuary.

"Allegra Marques, you say?" The black-haired woman looked thoughtful. "And the gendarmes will be watching her? Then so must we. Whatever Otto told her, we must know it."

"Do we have anyone in Paganini Hall?" Gottfried inquired.

Natalia got up. "That is not for you to know." She offered the man a thin smile as he also rose to his feet. "You have done well, Gottfried. This is a very bad business, and

we must all be wary indeed. If you learn anything else, leave a message in the usual place.” She held out her hand, and Gottfried took it and kissed it. “Music must be free,” she said.

“Music must be free,” Gottfried echoed, and watched her walk away, admiring her bearing. Then he sat down on the bench once more and took out a packet of sandwiches. Behind him, the clock in the tower of the Grand Hall struck the three-quarters, and he muttered a curse and began to eat hastily. These secret meetings were playing havoc with his digestion.

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Sir Daniel, lunching in his apartments above the Grand Hall, spared not a glance through the window at the square outside. He was still obscurely troubled.

There had been a scant paragraph in the morning paper about the murder of an unnamed man, and the fact that an unnamed student had been involved in the discovery of the body. He had visited the College that morning, taking time away from his normal routine, and after a few questions in the right places, he had a shrewd idea who the student might be. Though what she had been doing over in the Singers’ Quarter, when she should have been quietly eating dinner in Paganini Hall, was beyond his art to fathom. Coming, moreover, so hard upon his inconclusive talk with her on the steps of the cathedral, this anomaly gave more than adequate cause for concern.

He dismissed at once the possibility that she might have done the deed herself. Sir Daniel, in a lifetime of serving the Orchestra and people of Vienna in various capacities, had accumulated, he felt, enough experience of the vagaries of their minds to know when to suspect the potential for violence, and in Allegra Marques he saw none. His concern was all for her. And, of course, for the town and the Orchestra.

He finished his simple meal and rang the little bell beside his plate, and a moment later Jules brought him coffee. Sir Daniel thanked the man with a smile, poured himself a cup, added milk and sugar, and took a sip.

Murder, while not by any means unknown, and not in any case a matter for the civil authorities, was not to be overlooked. He would visit the Gendarmerie this afternoon

and make discreet enquiries. If the thing turned out to have political aspects, then he must know. And he must keep a close eye on Fraulein Marques.

Having made his decision, Sir Daniel put aside the matter, moved his plate away and turned his attention to the latest trade reports. Boston was increasing the asking price of fish oil again, citing all kinds of reasons; decreasing stocks, difficulty of transportation, competition from Moscow. Sir Daniel sighed. His apothecary would be charging more for his liniment, and in the cold weather to come Sir Daniel would be practically house-bound without it. He made a note to petition the Examining Board for a slight increase in the stipend of all Resident Conductors, and took a minute or two to work out a proposal by which the increased outlay could be recovered in revenue without placing an undue burden on any particular class. Some might say that music should be free, but they never considered the rising cost of fish oil.

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Andrei finally caught up with Allegra as they were leaving the dining hall after lunch. She turned and smiled at him as they emerged into the quadrangle, and he was suddenly ashamed that he had not thought of her since breakfast.

“Andrei,” she said. “How are you today?”

“Never mind me,” he said. “How are you? I was worried.”

No you weren't, said her eyes, *but it's all right.* “I had a little adventure last night,” she said, and told him the tale, rather more briefly than she had told it to Frederica the previous night. “It was all rather horrible,” she finished, “but I’m a lot better now.”

Andrei was suitably shocked. “Are you sure?” he said. “How awful for you. And you’ve no idea who he was?”

“I could hardly see him,” Allegra said reasonably, “but no, I had never met him before. Not that one could really call this a meeting.”

“Still, though,” Andrei persisted. “And then to have to deal with the gendarmes as well. Were they very horrible to you?”

“The gendarmes,” Allegra said, “were perfectly charming. One of them bought me currywurst.”

“How nice,” Andrei said through his teeth. He had no love for the forces of law, though in fact he had no real cause to hate them either. A monitory bell rang somewhere, and Andrei looked up and cursed.

“I have to go,” he said. “You’re sure you’re all right?”

“Honestly, Andrei,” Allegra said, “do I not look all right? I assure you I’m perfectly well. Go and do whatever you have to do. I shall see you tonight at dinner.”

Andrei, torn, and irritated by her manner, let his irritation pull him away. He felt her eyes on him as he stalked across the grass, and fumed inwardly. Could a man not express concern about the well-being of his...of his friend without being pulled up like that? What was the matter with her?

Allegra, for her part, had thought of another problem. *Tell Friedrich*, the dying man had said. But was it Friedrich Somebody or Somebody Friedrich? There were Friedrichs of both types all over the place. This was obviously a Friedrich in a position of power...but where? Suppose there were two possibles. How should she know which one was right? And if she told the wrong one...

Hundreds. Hundreds will die.

And among them could well be Allegra Marques.

Allegra’s mind, as Sir Daniel had noted, was of the questioning sort, and suffered from the principal flaw common to all such minds; in the absence of answers, it went on questioning, and could well end up questioning its own operating assumptions. She had always assumed that the movement whose motto was “music must be free” were at base a benign force, or at very least not actively harmful. They sought only to liberate music from the domination of the church. An outrage of the sort that would result in wholesale slaughter could never help their cause; would only hinder it. So why?

Allegra went off to her own next lesson, unhappy and frustrated.

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Over the next few days this pattern repeated itself. Meetings between Allegra and Andrei were few and generally unsatisfying; both their minds were elsewhere, and

neither could understand why the other did not seem to wish to bridge the gap. By the end of the week they were merely exchanging unconvincing smiles as they passed each other in the corridors or the quadrangle.

Meanwhile, a new student arrived in Paganini Hall. He gave his name as Leon, a visiting Second Cellist from Amsterdam. Allegra, smarting under the latest seeming rebuff from Andrei, set herself out to be friendly, but Leon's responses to her conversational overtures were monosyllabic and uncomfortable, and she retired hurt once again. Leon became, with a swiftness that might have surprised her if she had spared it a thought, simply part of the background, ever-present, quick dark eyes constantly watching.

At about the same time, Frederica noticed, though Allegra herself did not, that their tutors seemed to be starting to take a keener interest in her. Even while they were talking to another student, or to the class in general, their eyes would be on Allegra, as though they expected something from her. Not, Frederica thought, that there was not cause for concern; Allegra, usually quick to participate, seemed now withdrawn and inattentive, and grew fretful when questioned. Something was on her mind, and it required no great mental effort to link it to the incident of the dead man.

This conclusion was only strengthened when, in the middle of Intonation and Phrasing, a porter came to the classroom to fetch Frederica to the principal's office. Sir Daniel Richter was there, and a strange woman, with greying fair hair and a strong chin, who introduced herself as Inspector Fischer of the Gendarmerie. The principal, Herr Mindszenty, looked unhappy as he quitted the room and Fischer waved Frederica to a seat in front of the big desk.

"Now, I don't want you to be alarmed, Fraulein von Beck," she said, showing large yellowed teeth in a smile, "and if you wish to leave at any time, you may do so. You're not in any trouble." Frederica wondered if she had imagined the slight stress on the first word. "This is just an informal visit to clear up a few details about the incident in which your friend Fraulein Marques was involved. You share a room with her, don't you?"

"Ye-es," Frederica said cautiously. Over Fischer's head, Sir Daniel gave her a fatherly

smile of encouragement.

“It must have been a really shocking experience for her,” the inspector said, sounding genuinely sympathetic. “I expect she was a good bit put about when she came in that night?”

“Put about, Frau Inspektor?” Frederica echoed.

“Shaken. Rattled,” Fischer elaborated.

“Well, yes, a bit,” Frederica said. “But I think she was over the worst of it by then.”

“She told you what had happened, of course.” Fischer did not wait for confirmation. “I don’t suppose you would care to just run through the story as she told it to you, would you?”

“But she’s already told you, surely.” A thought occurred to Frederica. “If you’re suggesting she’s *lied*—”

Fischer held up one hand. “I’m not suggesting anything of the sort,” she said soothingly. “It’s only that, when one’s had a shock, as we’ve agreed Fraulein Marques must have, things can get a little muddled up in the mind. She may have told you something she forgot to mention to us, or indeed vice versa. It really would help us enormously.”

Put that way, it certainly made sense, and Sir Daniel nodded approvingly. Frederica launched into the tale. She told it rather better than Allegra had, in her own opinion at least, but she was conscientious about details and neither added nor subtracted. Fischer listened attentively, making careful notes, and when Frederica had finished she produced another notebook, paged through it and set the two side by side on the desk and read both through, obviously comparing.

“Oh,” she said, and her eyebrows went up. She looked from one to the other, and frowned. Sir Daniel leaned forward to look, and Fischer snapped both notebooks abruptly shut and put them away. “Well, thank you, Fräulein von Beck,” she said, with another smile. “That’s all for the moment. If you think of anything else that might help, do let us know.” She skimmed a card across the desk, and Frederica caught it automatically. Fischer stood up. “Thank you,” she said again. “You’ve been most

helpful.”

Frederica was frowning as she left the office. The inspector had noticed something, something wrong. She had not said so, but it had been obvious. Something about the two stories did not match. She went back over Allegra’s story as she had related it. Had she left anything out? No, she had not. That meant...that meant either that Allegra had told her something she had not told the gendarmes, or she had told the gendarmes something she had not told Frederica. And perhaps that accounted for her odd distraction of late; perhaps she had realised that she had left something out of one account or the other and was worrying about it.

She would have to find out.

Back in the principal’s office, Sir Daniel frowned severely at the inspector as she gathered her things together and shrugged on her overcoat.

“That was most reprehensible,” he said.

Fischer turned to him, all innocence. “Why, Conductor,” she said, “whatever can you mean?”

“You know as well as I that the accounts tallied exactly,” Sir Daniel said.

“In what way did I indicate that things were otherwise?” Fischer’s face bore the smile of a predator now. “Due respect, Conductor, but I pray that you look after the spiritual well-being of your Musicians and let me do my job my way. That Marques girl is hiding something and it’s got to be brought out. After all, if she’s part of this seditious gang you will not want questions asked, about whether *you* know, will you?”

“I already know she is not,” Sir Daniel said vehemently.

“In which case, she—and you—will have nothing to fear, will you ?” Fischer said sweetly. “Thank you for coming along, Conductor. Can we drop you off anywhere?”

“No thank you.” Sir Daniel was furious, but doing his best to obscure it. “Just intonation to you, Frau Inspektor.”

“Equal temperament, Conductor.” Fischer opened the door and let it bang shut behind her. After a moment it opened again and Mindszenty edged in, still badly shaken. *Put about*, Sir Daniel thought, and forced his futile anger to subside.

“Thank you, Herr Doktor,” he said, “for the use of your office.”

Mindszenty mumbled something, and Sir Daniel excused himself. The man was too easily intimidated, he thought. *And what does that make me?*

He strode across the quadrangle to the gate, hesitated. Should he find the girl, Frederica, reassure her that the inspector’s trick had been just that? He hesitated, and lost his nerve. The woman could be right. God knew he was fallible enough. And he might only succeed in putting both girls on their guard.

Jules was waiting up for him when he got back to his apartments. There was hot coffee and toasted sandwiches, and a warm fire, but his heart refused to relinquish its chill.

“Jules,” he said, “have you ever had dealings with the Gendarmerie?”

The man looked shocked. “Me, Conductor? Oh no. My family have always been most respectable.”

“And most fortunate, perhaps,” Sir Daniel remarked, and then was ashamed of himself when Jules looked stricken. “Never mind, Jules, let it pass. Off with you to bed now.”

The servant departed, still plainly troubled. Sir Daniel, when he had taken the office, had wanted to dispense with the services of all his predecessor’s personal staff—some fifteen or sixteen in number—but had allowed his peers to prevail upon him to keep Jules, his driver Rozamund, and Gennaro the handyman. He still sometimes regretted it. Still, hot coffee and toasted sandwiches on a night like this were a powerful argument, and Jules had been invaluable in many other ways. A Resident Conductor could not be seen to have friends.

What could he do?

He was the ultimate spiritual authority in Vienna, *ex officio* head of the College and Director of the Orchestra. Thousands of people looked to him for guidance. It was all too easy to mistake such authority for power. Many Resident Conductors had, and did.

But the plain fact was that he was helpless in cases such as this. Fischer represented

the secular arm. She answered to Commandant Perlman, and he directly to the President of the Examining Board in Philharmonia. Sir Daniel could no more compel her than he could fly. He and Perlman were not on good terms.

As for her offensive implication that he himself might be involved, well, let her build a fugue on that if she might. She would find that theme barren of invention. Sir Daniel had, as has already been mentioned, his share of secrets, but disaffection with Holy Church was not among them, and never had been. Still, Fischer's words troubled him. Once let her mention that suspicion to Perlman, and he would have no peace day or night.

He retired to bed with a volume of the Venerable Tovey, but again, sleep was long in coming, and brought no comfort when it came.

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Another week passed, and the bulk of the snow arrived, drifting down from the sky and settling deeper and deeper in the streets, where it combined with mud and horse manure to make a fetid, treacherous brown sludge. The city's ancient snow plough was reclaimed from its shed and chugged around the main streets, clearing away the worst of it, only for the next fall of snow to undo all its good work.

Allegra sleepwalked through her classes and played listlessly at the various seasonal events in which the students were permitted to be involved. Frederica, trying to probe the mystery, met with evasions, remonstrations and one full-on temper tantrum. After that she stopped trying, but the matter remained unresolved.

Yevgeny had been less than helpful. Nothing at all was planned for St. Richard's day, nor would be till February at the earliest. Frederica relayed this information to Allegra a little stiffly, since the tantrum was still rankling in her mind, and Allegra received it at first a little offhandedly; she had expected no help from that quarter, so to get none seemed already like old news. Later, though, coming belatedly to a recollection of herself, she sought the other girl out and effected as much of a reconciliation as she could, and Frederica went away more than half convinced that if Allegra had lied to anyone, it must have been to the gendarmes.

For her part, Allegra accepted that Frederica had acted in good faith in contacting

Yevgeny: she had expected to get nothing from that quarter; she had been correct. It wasn't really Frederica's fault.

What was clear was that, unless the dying man had been out of his mind, or mendacious, the solution to the mystery lay elsewhere and quite possibly several layers deeper.

And then she found herself, in the last week of term, on Restoration detail. It was an inevitable part of the student's education—those whom the Conservatoire adjudged inadequate at final graduation were often retained as Restoration staff, and there was a rota by which students were sent into the Archives to assist the current restorers (and, covertly, to be assessed as to whether that was, in truth, to be their *metier*).

Allegra usually found Restoration work pleasant and undemanding, and at this point it seemed like a gift from heaven. She resolutely put all her worries out of her mind and surveyed the ranks of damaged, worn-out Instruments awaiting treatment with something like anticipation. These were the tools of worship, after all, sacred in themselves to a degree; repairing them, replacing those parts that could not be repaired, painting, varnishing and polishing them till they shone, this was God's work as much as playing. Most of this kind of work was, of course, carried out outside the College by Artisans, but it was the rule that all students should be at least grounded in it. Hence, the rota.

Allegra selected a cello that had seen far better days, and fell to examining it. Around her, other students were reborning flutes and oboes, carefully taking apart the valves of trumpets and horns, pounding dents out of timpani and making sure the slides of trombones were no longer prone to stick halfway up. College life was hard on Instruments.

In just a few days, she would pack a small bag and take a coach for her mother's cottage in the hills outside the town. She had counted her remaining money and she had just enough for the fare there and back, and some food to brighten the festive table. It would be pleasant, and undemanding, very like this, she thought as she carefully removed a cracked fingerboard, and there would be no reason to think of

anything beyond the needs of the moment.

Across the room, the dark eyes of Leon were trained on her. He had had some trouble manoeuvring himself on to the Restoration rota, but the Gendarmerie were not without influence. Fräulein Marques was a cool customer, no question, but Inspektor Fischer had been quite definite; she must be watched every moment of the day, till she revealed her co-conspirators. With any luck this would mean promotion for Leon. He already had his coach ticket.

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Andrei Ostrowski, meanwhile, was revising his own plans.

His parents lived in town—his mother was a Conductor, his father a Soloist—and Christmas for them was always a big family occasion. The house would be full of light and noise and appetising smells, the food would be plentiful and delectable, and the winter chill would be kept far away with roaring fires, good wines and good company. But not for Andrei, not this year.

He knew now what Allegra had not told him, that the dead man she had encountered was a soldier in the cause in which Andrei himself passionately believed. He had connected her increasingly distraught attitude with this incident, and guessed that there was more going on here than met the eye. That had been before the interview with the inspector of gendarmes, who had confirmed his suspicion that Allegra had not been honest with him.

So when the woman known only as Natalia, with the very black hair, had come to see him, posing as a distant aunt, and enjoined him in the name of the cause to watch over Allegra and see with whom she made contact, Andrei had readily agreed. If the dead man, Otto Cravi, had passed information on to Allegra before he died—if she then passed that information, whatever it might be, to the gendarmes—then the movement would be damaged, perhaps even destroyed.

So Andrei had told his mystified parents that he needed to spend Christmas in solitude this year, had accepted money in lieu of his share of the festive fare and used it to rent a small cottage in the village where Allegra's mother lived, and had bought

himself a ticket on the early mail coach, so as to avoid an embarrassing encounter. He was not happy about it, but sacrifices were necessary in great causes. Otto had sacrificed his life. A missed family Christmas was a small price to pay in comparison. He would watch Allegra, from a distance. He would see where she went, with whom she talked. He would find out what was said. He would find out why she had lied to him, betrayed his trust. And if what the inspector had hinted was true—if Allegra were no better than a police spy...

Music must be free. Andrei believed that with all his heart.

No single life was worth more than that.