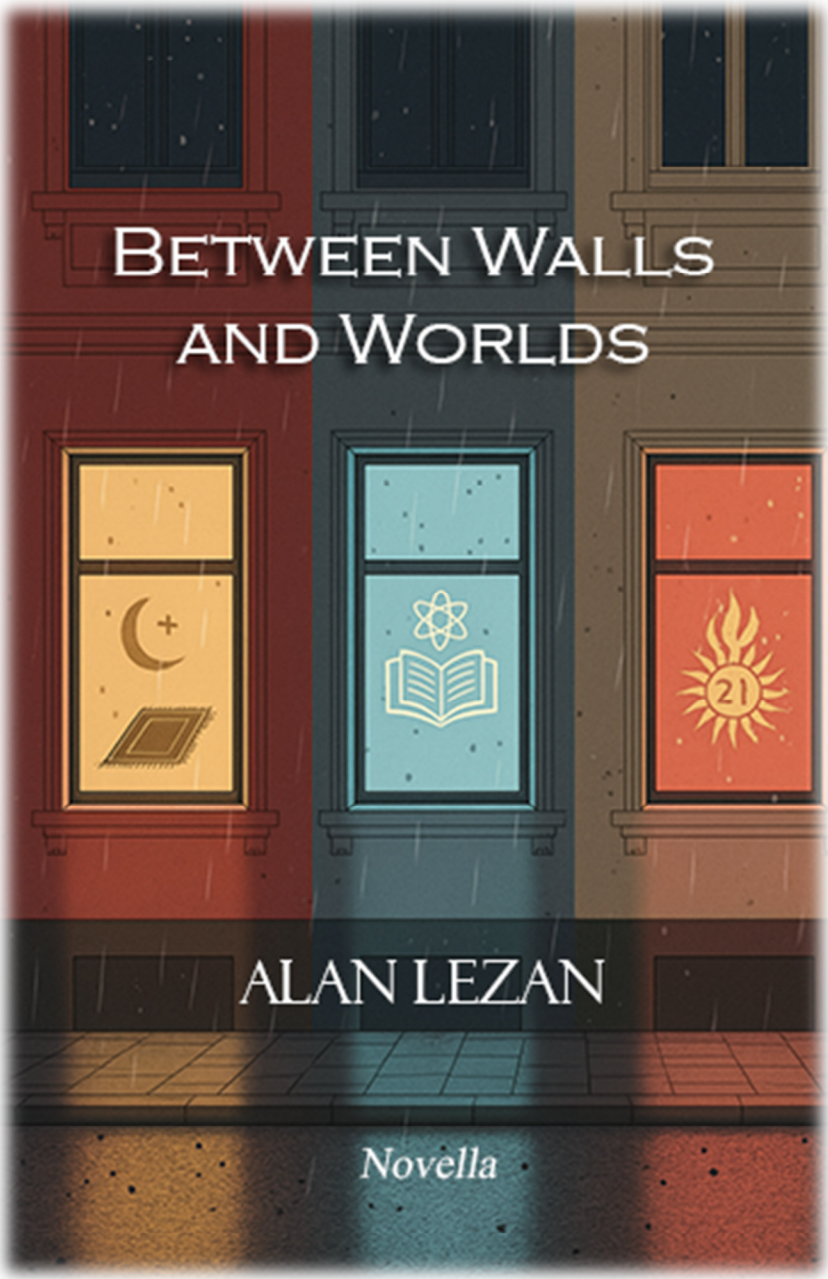
Between Walls and Worlds
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ALAN LEZAN
Novella

Prolog

The city was damp in those days. Not just from the rain gathering in the gutters and sliding down the facades in thin threads, but from a kind of inner permeability, as if Berlin had decided to soften its skin. Friedrichshain smelled of wet leaves, of coffee, of the last residue of summer clinging to the courtyards like a forgotten scarf.

In one of the old buildings, whose stairwell smelled of floor wax and antique mailboxes, lived a man of few words. Not out of shyness, nor pride—but because the words had withdrawn from him, like friends who no longer call. The flat he inhabited was large, almost too large for a single person. The floorboards creaked with every step, as if trying to remember. The walls bore traces of former occupants: a nail that held nothing; a shadow where a shelf once stood; a stain that never quite vanished.

He was often alone, but not lonely. Silence was familiar to him, like a garment one no longer feels. Sometimes he sat by the window, watching the rain hit the wall of the building opposite. Sometimes he heard voices from the courtyard, the clinking of bottles, the laughter that lost itself in the darkness. And sometimes, when the night was particularly soft, he spoke to himself—softly, almost tenderly, as if needing to remind himself that he was still there.

The flat was not a place of action, but a condition. It wasn't waiting for anything specific, but it was ready. Ready for footsteps, for voices, for what can unfold between people when no one dictates what should happen. There were no

plans, no intentions. Only rooms that could be opened. Doors that were unlocked. And a man who had learned not to ask, but to listen.

Outside, the city rushed on. Inside, something that had no name began.

Thursday Evening

The city was muted, as if wrapped in a cloak of fog. I sat in my kitchen, the light warm, but tired. Then the phone rang. David. His voice was clear, almost too clear for my world, which moved as if seen through frosted glass. "Don't sell the flat," he said. "You could rent out some of your rooms. You are too alone. And even if you can't stand casual flatshares—it would be good to hear someone breathe. It's not like you want pets."

I remained silent.

After the call, I sat for a long time. The silence was dense, almost physical. I never intended to live with anyone. Not with animals, not with people. The depression was like a leaden curtain that refused to lift. I had made plans to live "normally" again—whatever that meant. But nothing helped. The medication kept me barely afloat, but the water was cold, and I was tired of treading.

Strangers in my Flat?

I wondered if I really wanted that. Or if I wanted anything at all anymore. Since the illness, David was the only one who remained. The others—girlfriends, acquaintances—had not stopped contacting me. Cinema, theater, cafés, clubs. I always said "no." By the third time, they stopped asking. I understood them. It wasn't their fault. I remained behind, in this four-room flat that I had once worked for like a monument—and now it was a mausoleum.

After about an hour, I stood up.

I sat down at the computer and wrote an advertisement. Without grand words. Without hope. And yet—barely sixty minutes later, I had fifty emails in my inbox. I didn't read them. I took the first three and set appointments for Sunday afternoon. Three interviews, back-to-back. Then I called David. He was happy. I heard it in his voice, and for a moment there was light.

But then the fear came.
It crept in slowly, like fog under the door.
Three strangers in my space, my retreat, my silence.
How would that work?
Would it truly do me good?
Or would I lose myself in voices that were not my own?

[Scene: Berlin old building flat, Friedrichshain. Sunday, 2:30 PM. The sun falls diagonally through the tall windows, dust dances in the air. The kitchen smells of tea and old wood. I sit at the table, David leans against the doorframe, a mug in his hand.]

Perhan – Between Walls and Worlds

I glance at the clock, then at the door:
"You are punctual. That's a good sign already."
Perhan (enters, slender build, calm gaze):
"I was ten minutes early. I walked around the block again. I didn't want to ring too soon."
(I smiled slightly and said):
"I understand. Please sit down. Would you like some tea?"
Perhan:
"Gladly. Black, if you have it..."
David *(wordlessly hands him a mug, nods kindly):*
"Black. No sugar. Like a good start."
I *(after a short pause):*
"So, Perhan. Three rooms, three people. I don't want a flat share just for utility, but no soul-melding either. It's about respect, about space, about breathing. What are you looking for?"

Perhan *(takes a sip, then speaks slowly):*
"I am looking for a place that doesn't ask me where I come from. I am from Bosnia, from a village with many scars. I study electrical engineering, but sometimes I write poems. I am quiet, but not empty."

I:
"And community? What does that mean to you?"
Perhan:
"Not control. Not closeness at any price. But a light in the hallway that doesn't burn only for me. Perhaps a conversation in the evening. Perhaps just the knowledge that someone is there."
David, *(softly, almost to himself):*
"Sounds like you're not just looking for a room, but an in-between space."
Perhan nodded:
"I like 'in-between space.'"
I:
"One more question, Perhan. What makes you difficult?"

Perhan *(hesitates, then honestly):* "I withdraw when things get loud. I need time to build trust. And sometimes I struggle with words, especially in German. But I listen well."
I *(looked at him for a long time, then calmly):*
"Thank you. That was clear. And quiet.
Two other applicants are also invited. But I can tell already—you are not just any applicant."
Perhan *(stands up, carefully puts down the mug):*
"Thank you both. For the tea. And for the silence."
David *(nods):*
"Sometimes silence is the best thing one can share."

Perhan is 23 years old and has lived in Berlin for three years. He comes from a remote place in Central Bosnia, where the hills are soft and the memories are heavy. He grew up amidst mosques, traces of war, and neighbours of various origins—quiet, observant, with a fine sense for technology and in-between spaces. Today, he is in his fourth semester of

electrical engineering: a subject that gives him stability, but also shows him limits.

His German is fluent, yet sometimes he stumbles over articles or expectations. Words do not always come easily to him, but when they do, they are deliberate, deep, and often of quiet beauty.

His name – Perhan – is a silent homage paid by his parents to the character of the same name in Emir Kusturica's film *Time of the Gypsies*, whose vulnerable dignity, silent strength, and yearning individualism moved them so deeply that they saw in him the reflection of that quiet strength they hoped to see in their own son—a sign that identity is not just about origin, but also the possibility of shaping oneself beyond all labels.

For Perhan, his name is a symbol of otherness—and the longing to define himself beyond ethnic categories, a boy with vulnerable strength, with dignity in his gaze. For a Muslim boy, the name is unusual, almost defiant against conventions. Yet, that is precisely where its power lies. For Perhan, it is a sign of being different, an attempt to locate himself beyond ethnic grids.

He wears this name like a coat that sometimes warms him, sometimes lies heavily on his shoulders. Between languages, cultures, and expectations, he seeks a place that does not question him, but recognizes him. Berlin is a promise to him—and a crucible. Between lecture halls, flat share conversations, and long underground train rides, he thinks a lot: about origin, about closeness, about what remains.

He lives in an in-between space.

On one side: the world he comes from—full of rituals, memories, and familiar voices.

On the other: the city that demands much of him—fast, functional, often lonely.

And in between: Perhan.

Perhaps he will find himself in a profession. Perhaps in an encounter. Perhaps in a poem he writes in his notebook at night, when everything is silent and the walls no longer press, but listen.

Hier ist die literarische Übersetzung des nächsten Abschnitts, wobei der atmosphärische und rhythmische Stil beibehalten wird:

After the conversation with Perhan, I simply handed him the key to the flat and said, "The room is yours. You can move in whenever you like." He was very pleased, thanked me, and left the apartment. David laughed loudly and said, "Man! People do exist! Unbelievable."

And then came the second one: ***Sunday, 3:00 PM.***

Thais

The sun stood diagonally above the roofs of Friedrichshain, casting long shadows onto the parquet floor when Thais rang the doorbell. Punctual, as announced. I opened the door, and there she stood—23 years old, a Berlin native, with a gaze that was both alert and

reserved. She studies Film Studies at the Free University, a combined Bachelor's degree, as she casually mentioned when we sat down opposite each other at the kitchen table.

The conversation was brief, but it flowed. No contrived questions, no forced answers. It was as if a silent space had opened between us, where everything essential had already been said before it was spoken.

Thais was smart, you sensed that immediately—not loud, not intrusive, but in the way she listened, in the way she chose her words. Pretty, yes, but in a way that had nothing to do with surfaces. Her presence was light, almost cinematic—as if she moved through rooms like through scenes, with an inner rhythm one didn't want to disturb.

I handed her the master key. Without ceremony, but with a silent agreement. "You can move in whenever you like," I said. She took it, thanked me with a smile that was neither too much nor too little. Then she left.

The door clicked shut softly.
And for a moment, the flat remained silent—not empty, but open.
And the third: ***Sunday, 3:30 PM.***

Zofia

The flat was still filled with the echo of the last conversation when the doorbell rang again. I opened the door, and there she was: Zofia. 22 years old, from Warsaw, with a gaze that wasn't searching, but already seeing. Her presence was quiet, almost like a sketch—as if

she herself were a drawing, not quite finished, but full of intention.

It was as if she had already absorbed the atmosphere of the apartment before stepping inside. She studies Graphic and Communication Design at the Berlin University of the Arts, within the framework of Visual Communication—conceptual, experimental, with social weight. Her words were precise, but not cold. She spoke of crossing boundaries, of critical thinking, of images that don't just want to be beautiful, but necessary.

I asked little. She answered briefly, but with depth. It wasn't a conversation in the classical sense, but rather an exchange of atmospheres. Her voice had something fragile about it, but not breakable. Like paper that can be folded without tearing.

Zofia wasn't loud, wasn't trying too hard. She was simply there—like a thought that doesn't impose itself, but stays. I sensed that she doesn't just inhabit spaces, but changes them. Not through words, but through attitude.

I handed her the master key. She took it, without hesitation, but with silent respect. "You can move in whenever you like," I said. She nodded, thanked me in Polish—softly, almost like a whisper—and left the flat.

The door closed.
And for a moment, something new was in the room.
Not loudness. Not movement.
Just the suspicion that change sometimes begins quietly.
David, who had been standing silently by the window until then, finally spoke:

"She won't talk much. But I think she will make something in you resonate that you haven't heard for a long time."
David stayed for another hour.

He sat in the old armchair by the window, the mug long empty, his words sparse but warm. My best friend. My only one. He sensed what I myself could barely grasp—a fear that had no name but took up space. I tried to smile, but my insides were restless, like water that refuses to calm.

"It will be good," he kept saying.

And I nodded.

But my head was full of questions, full of worries that could not be chased away by reason. The three I had invited—Perhan, Thais, Zofia—all made a friendly impression. And yet: friendliness is no guarantee. People can do all sorts of things. Even the things you don't expect.

I pondered.

Perhaps it was a mistake to hope for closeness. Perhaps I should let go of the idea of a chosen flatshare—that image of communal living, of kitchen conversations, of movie nights, of shared worries and shared bread. I didn't want that, and I couldn't handle it.

My pension barely covers things anymore. The rental income is necessary to keep me financially afloat. And the flat—my beautiful, quiet flat—I truly don't want to sell...

Perhaps a flatshare based purely on utility is the more honest form.

A functional living structure: clear, practical, without emotional entanglement. Everyone in their own room. Live and let live. For many, this is a transitional solution. For me, perhaps a sanctuary.

I could have asked about political stances, about artistic lifestyles, about long-term perspectives. But in truth, I didn't want any of that. I didn't want a shared future. I wanted peace.

David said nothing more.

He only looked at me, with that gaze that does not judge, but stays.

I was nervous. Restless.

But also a little relieved.

Because perhaps clarity begins not with a decision, but with the admission that you no longer want to carry everything alone.

David stood at the window, looked out at the street, which was slowly sliding into the evening.

Then he turned to me, and said with that voice that never pushes, but always hits its mark:

"You don't have to let anyone in, Alan. But maybe you should stop leaving yourself completely out in the cold."

David || Schöneberg, Eternity

David was my everything. My compass, my light, my quiet anchor in a world that was often too loud. What would I do without him? We were both born in Schöneberg, in that part of Berlin that smells of asphalt and linden blossoms after a summer rain. From nursery school through primary school to high school—we walked the same path, but David walked it differently.

He was never like the others. Early on, he lived his homosexuality openly, with a self-assurance that simultaneously shamed and freed all of us. The boys were fascinated, the girls were in love, and David—David was simply David. Tall, athletic, with a body formed as if from light, and a mind full of numbers and stars. Mathematics and computers were his refuges, but the nights belonged to us: Berlin clubs, cafés, the flickering life between neon and fog. We laughed, danced, lived—sometimes until morning, sometimes until it hurt.

Then came Laia (Eulàlia). Having moved from Barcelona (Catalonia) to Berlin at the age of three, she was like a warm wind from the south. Her voice held something of water flowing over pebbles, and her eyes carried stories she had not yet told. She was in the neighbouring class, but soon she was everywhere we were. When the three of us came together, the world was a little too bright, a little too loud, a little too beautiful. A friendship forged from granite and light—unbreakable, flowing, eternal.

An evening on ***Motzstraße, 2007:***

Three Moons

David leans by the window, a cigarette between his fingers, the street lamp casting lines on his cheeks. The city outside is silent, only the hum of the night, the faint rush of cars, the flickering of traffic lights. Laia sits on the carpet, barefoot, a glass of red wine in her hand. I lie on the sofa, half lost in thought, half immersed in the music coming from the old radio.

David: "Do you remember how we fooled that guy with the glitter shirt on Eisenacher Straße back then?"

Laia: (laughs) "He thought we were a performance trio. I was the Spanish dancer, Alan the melancholic poet, and you... you were just you."

I: (grin) "I was never melancholic. Just quiet. You were the flame, I was the shadow."

David: (turns around) "You were never a shadow, Alan. You were the reason I dared to shine."

Silence. Only the hum of the city.

Laia: "I think we were never just friends. We were a small universe. Three moons that never quite touch, but always circle each other."

Hier ist die literarische Übersetzung des nächsten, sehr emotionalen und rhythmischen Abschnitts. Besonderes Augenmerk wurde auf die poetische Darstellung der Depression und der feinfühligen Dialoge gelegt.

When the Light Recedes

It was a time that defies articulation. A time with Laia and David that felt like a brilliant summer—full of conversation, full of music, full of closeness. We were a triad of light, depth, and motion. And I was in the middle of it, carried by their warmth, their intelligence, their unwavering friendship. Until October 2023.

I was forty. And something inside me began to tilt. Not suddenly, not loudly—but like a horizon slowly descending. Stress had accumulated over years, like fine dust in the cracks of an old house. And then came the diagnosis: schizoaffective disorder. A word that sounds like a crack in a mirror. Manic-depressive, they said. And when the mania climbed too high, psychosis came—a kind of schizophrenia that settled into my mind like a strange guest and refused to leave.

The medication helped me manage daily life. I could shop, speak, smile—but everything else was gone. The depth, the joy, the feeling of being part of the world. Laia, my beautiful, intelligent Laia, did everything to hold onto me. She talked to me, cooked for me, took me to cafés, to parks, into conversations. David was there, as always, like a silent star. But their efforts bounced off a wall that I myself could no longer penetrate.

I wanted only one thing: to leave. Not out of defiance. Not out of anger. But out of exhaustion. I had a beautiful flat, four rooms, flooded with light. I lived off my early retirement—it was enough to survive, not to live. The three rooms stood empty, like frozen spaces of my past. I wanted to open them, not just out of financial necessity, but because I hoped that with the people, the *Now* would also return.

For when the light recedes, only shadow remains. Not the poetic one, not the gentle one—but the kind that settles into every movement, every thought, every hope. The colours fade. The sounds become muffled. Even the presence of others feels like being separated by glass. You still smile, out of habit. But the smile no longer reaches anything. Not the eyes. Not the heart.

They say it is chemical. A lack of serotonin. A biological whisper that says: "I can't go on." And yes, sometimes it is exactly that. But it is also history. It is exhaustion. It is a world too loud for a soul that has gone quiet.

Depression is not a state. It is a place. A room without windows, where time stretches and thoughts condense like fog. And sometimes, when that fog grows too dense, when one's own existence feels like a mistake, the desire to leave arises. Not out of hatred for life, but out of longing for peace. For a place where it no longer hurts.

But even in this darkness, there are voices. Memories. People who were once light. And sometimes, a single sentence, a gaze, a warm tea in a quiet café is enough to open the door a crack. To say: You are not alone. You are not wrong. You are not lost.

Because even when the light recedes—there is always a spark somewhere. And sometimes a spark is enough to survive an entire night.

"And I Let Her Go"

After two years of illness, my body had fallen silent. Not just externally, but in that inner space where desire, curiosity, and closeness once resided. The sexual longing that once flowed like a quiet stream through my life had run dry. Not out of aversion, not out of coldness—but out of exhaustion. I was empty. And I did not want Laia to bind herself to this emptiness.

She was healthy, radiant, intelligent. She had studied economics, was a manager at a bank, earned well, and moved through the world with that elegant self-assurance I had once admired. And I? I was a shadow of myself. A man who had once worked, loved, laughed—and now barely knew how to straighten himself up.

I watched her making coffee in the mornings, handing me the newspaper, trying to bring life into our flat. And I sensed it: she was grieving. Not for the dead, but for me—as if I had died while still being present. And that was the worst thing. Not the illness. Not the medication. But her gaze, which searched for me and could no longer find me.

So I said it. Quietly. Without drama. I asked her to leave. To live her life. Not to continue wasting her strength on my silence. I wanted her to dance, to laugh, to love—without the weight of my darkness on her shoulders.

It was not a farewell born of lack of love. It was a final act of love. Because sometimes, the greatest thing you can do for someone is to set them free. Not to bind them to your own lostness. To let them go, so they do not sink with you.

And so, I let her go. And she left. With tears in her eyes, but with the light still in her heart. I remained behind—in my flat, with my early retirement, with my memories. And sometimes, when the light falls through the window, I believe she is smiling somewhere. And living.

Moving In

The morning after the interviews, the flat was silent, as if holding its breath. Then, slowly, like figures in a play, they came—one after the other. The new flatmates. With bags, with boxes, with looks that searched and yet held back. It was as if the flat had to newly remember who it was.

I stayed in my room on the right, the one with the winter garden. The place where the light caught in the panes and the plants outside danced like shadows. My room was empty, almost ascetic. My desk, where my computer stood, next to it my bed, two old Chesterfield armchairs that looked like they belonged to another time. Everything else I had thrown out—as if I needed to make space for something that never came.

Perhan moved into the small room to my left. It had a narrow balcony facing Revaler Straße, where the wind sometimes sounded like a voice. His room was spartan: a bed, a chair, a small desk. The few clothes he owned were meticulously

folded over the bow—as if they were more than fabric, as if they were memory. He spoke little, but his gaze was calm, almost tender toward the space he now inhabited.

To Perhan's left, Zofia took the large room, similar to mine. But she transformed it. Her pictures on the walls—self-drawn, full of lines that flowed like thoughts—turned the space into an atelier of the soul. She was an artist, you sensed it immediately. Not loud, not eccentric, but with that quiet power that transforms rooms without disturbing them.

And opposite Zofia, facing the courtyard, Thais moved into the middle room. Thais was different. She was flame. Fire. Her steps had rhythm, her voice had stance. Politically engaged, a small anarchist, as she called herself—with a smile that simultaneously challenged and invited. She spoke of assemblies, of ideas, of resistance. Her room was still empty, but you felt: it wouldn't stay that way for long.

I spoke briefly, casually, with each of them as they carried their belongings, opened their doors, entered their rooms. Small conversations, like loose threads that didn't intertwine. I didn't know much. Only what lay between the sentences. And that was enough.

For sometimes, it is not knowledge that connects—but the silent observation. The shared breathing under one roof. The waiting to see if strangers might become something else. Perhaps a home. Perhaps a poem.

An Evening in the Winter Garden

The next day, as the sun sank behind the rows of houses and the windows became milky with light, I placed three bottles of sparkling wine and three bottles of red wine on the architect's table—a classic tabletop on trestles, like one finds in almost every studio, the Mayline track still resting across the edge. Those who wanted water could help themselves from the tap—as I did. I liked the sound as the glass slowly filled, clear and still.

Around eight o'clock, I invited everyone to come into my empty room. The winter garden was cool, but the light was soft, and the silence had space. They came. Zofia, Thais, Perhan. Each with their glass, their gaze, their story that was yet to be told.

Zofia and Thais took red wine; their voices soon mingled like colours on a canvas. They talked about art, about lines, about political bodies in space. I listened. I was silent. Perhan drank tap water, like me. He sat on the edge of my Chesterfield armchair, his hands still, his gaze somewhere between the wall and the floor.

Zofia: (smiling) "I believe rooms have memories. You just have to uncover them. Like with a drawing—the line is already there, you just have to find it."

Thais: (nods) "Or explode them. I like it when art doesn't just show, but disturbs."

I: (softly) "And what if it doesn't say anything at all? Just stays silent?"

Zofia: (looks at me) "Then perhaps it is you."

Perhan said nothing. I had tried several times to start a conversation with him. A sentence here, a question there. But it was as if he lived on a different frequency. I began to accept that he simply didn't speak. That silence was his language.

The conversations flowed on; I listened, but felt my energy receding. Around ten o'clock, I got up, slowly, cautiously, as if I shouldn't startle myself.

I: "Maybe you should take the bottles with you... Zofia, Thais... stay a while longer. I... I'm going to withdraw."

They nodded, kindly, but no one asked why. No one asked who I was, what I did, how I was. No one asked if I was ill. And perhaps that was good. Or perhaps that was exactly what was missing.

I remained behind in my room, which smelled of wine and water, of voices that weren't meant for me. And outside, beyond the glass of the winter garden, the night began to spread—silent, like Perhan. And I thought: Perhaps we are all just rooms that no one quite enters.

Hier ist die literarische Übersetzung des neuen Abschnitts, wobei der atmosphärische und rhythmische Stil beibehalten wird:

Children of the Sun and Fire

It was early evening. The light of the day slowly melted away, reflecting in the windows and settling like liquid gold on the cool kitchen tiles. I stood at the stove, the milk steaming softly in the pot, and the aroma of freshly ground coffee hung in the air—a latte macchiato, my small comfort for the transition between day and night.

The door opened, and Thais entered. Her shopping bags rustled like leaves in the wind. She was hungry, full of movement, and wanted to prepare something small. As she unpacked vegetables, her gaze caught a picture on the shelf—a blazing sun with the number "21" inside it. She pointed at it and asked, "What does that actually mean?"

I looked at her, not with curiosity, but with a quiet interest. Her appearance was like an urban poem: piercings flashed on her tongue and brow, tattoos stretched across her skin like fragments of a story she hadn't quite told yet. A young woman, like many today, yet moving at her own frequency.

"The symbol," I began, as I slowly let the espresso glide into the milk, "presumably stands for spiritual growth, for renewal, or a modern form of enlightenment. Perhaps inspired by the angel number 21. The sun—it's regarded in many cultures as a sign of life, energy, truth. In mystical contexts, it is often the highest consciousness, the divine source."

Thais had leaned against the counter by now, her hands wrapped around a teacup she hadn't even filled. I continued, softly, almost as if speaking to myself:

"The flames—they suggest transformation, purification, spiritual power. Fire, in many myths, is the element of change. And the number 21? In numerology, it is considered a sign of a new beginning, of progress, of manifestation. It says: You are ready to bring your vision into the world."

I paused. The coffee was ready. I placed it in front of me, took a sip, and looked at her. "It's not a religious symbol in the classic sense," I said, "rather an open sign for insight, for a new start."

Then, cautiously, almost like an offering: "Do you want to know more about what it means for the Kurds?"

She nodded. "Yes, please," she said—and I agreed.

Thais: "And why exactly 21 rays?"

I: "For the Kurds, this sun emblem has held religious and cultural significance since antiquity. The 21 rays originate from the Yazidi faith, one of the oldest monotheistic religions carried by the ancestors of the Kurds. There, the number has a sacred, mystical meaning."

Thais said: "Ah, I see! I once went to a Kurdish New Year festival—Newroz, I think? At the House of World Cultures. Does that also have something to do with it?"

I: "Yes, very much so. March 21st—Newroz—is both the beginning of the month and the new year according to the

ancient Kurdish calendar. It is the day winter ends and spring begins. The victory of light over darkness. The sun is at a right angle to the equator; day and night are equal. Both the North and South Poles lie on the line of the sunrise. Light is distributed equally across both hemispheres."

Thais: "That sounds almost like cosmic balance."

I: "Exactly. And in many Kurdish beliefs—whether Yâresân, Yazidism, or Rea Haq—people turn towards the sun during prayer. It is their Qibla, their direction of prayer. The number 21 represents the rebirth of an idea, of a being—and also symbolises the rebirth of the Kurdish nation after many trials. That is why the Kurds are called 'Children of the Sun and Fire.' The sun symbol with 21 rays is found worldwide only on the flags of the Kurds—and the Baloch, who also share Kurdish roots."

Thais: "Have they always lived according to the sun?"

I: "Yes. The Kurds, an Indo-European people, have a solar calendar that began over 7,000 years ago. The sun was not just a timekeeper, but a cultural symbol. Especially the kings of the Zilan Empire believed they received their power from the sun. They named themselves Mihrdad I, Mihrdad II, Mihrdad III... 'Mihr' means sun, 'Mihrdad' – 'the one who came from the sun.' Today, you might say: Rojda."

The birthday of the Kurdish king Mihrdad was celebrated in ancient times. The sun stood for the kings—and the kings for the light of the Kurds... That is why the sun remains a central symbol in their history to this day.

Thais smiled widely and said: "Highly interesting. Are you also a Child of the Sun and Fire?"

I smiled back and answered quietly: "Yes." Then I turned around, left the kitchen with my cup of coffee in hand, and went to my room.

Pierogi and the Divided Land

The next morning, around ten, the flat was bathed in soft light, a fine haze hung in the air as I entered the kitchen. The refrigerator hummed softly in the background. Zofia was already standing there, barefoot, with a glass of water in her hand, as if she were waiting for something she couldn't yet name herself.

"May I cook Polish for us tonight at eight?" she asked, without preamble, but with a tone that was almost ceremonial.

I hesitated briefly. Eight o'clock was late, and I knew I wouldn't want to stay for the whole evening. But an hour or so, I thought, that would be fine. I nodded. "Sure, you can do that." Then, almost casually: "What are you planning to cook?"

She smiled, and there was something playful in her gaze. "Pierogi! Have you ever eaten Polish food?"

I shook my head. "No, unfortunately not. What are pierogi?"

"Filled dumplings," she said, "sometimes sweet, sometimes savoury. It's the most famous dish we have. But Polish cuisine is much more than that. It's a good start, though."

I felt a slight flush of embarrassment. The fact that I had never eaten Polish food suddenly struck me as a small gap in my education. She seemed to sense this.

"I've never eaten Kurdish food either," she said suddenly. "You're Kurdish, aren't you?"

"Yes," I replied. "Did Thais tell you that?"

"Yes," she said. "I also know about the Children of the Sun and Fire."

We both laughed. It was a warm, light laugh that spread like steam in the kitchen.

Then she became serious again. "You know," she said, "Poles and Kurds share a similar fate."

I looked at her. "What do you mean by that?"

She nodded. "Both peoples were often referred to as 'peoples without a land.' Both have a large diaspora that preserves their identity abroad and is politically active. In some commentary, Kurdistan is even called 'the Poland of the Middle East.' Haven't you ever read that?"

I shook my head. "That's new to me. I know some things about the Kurds, but I didn't know that."

She continued, calmly, almost like a teacher who doesn't lecture, but shares: "The statement means that both peoples were stateless for long periods, divided by great powers, yet preserved their language, their culture, their dignity. Poland was divided three times in the 18th century—between Russia, Prussia, and Austria. For over 120 years, it didn't exist on the map. But the people remained—with language, with songs, with hope."

I took a sip of water. Her voice was calm, but she spoke with an inner glow that cannot be learned.

"And the Kurds," she continued, "have lived for centuries in a territory that spans today's Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria—or rather, is occupied by them. Millions of people, a strong cultural identity—and yet, to this day, no internationally recognised state."

I was silent. Surprised, touched. "Very interesting," I said softly. "Thank you for the information. As you can see, I still have some reading to do about the Kurds."

She smiled. "You were born in Berlin. To me, you are a true Berliner." Then she laughed, bright and carefree.

"Yes, you're right," I said, and before I walked to my room, I turned around one last time:

"I am curious to taste pierogi."

That evening at 8 PM:

Hier ist die literarische Übersetzung des nächsten, sehr persönlichen und intimen Abschnitts, wobei der Tonfall und

die poetische Darstellung der inneren Konflikte und der Sehnsucht nach kreativem Ausdruck beibehalten werden:

A Conversation about God: Origin and Taste

Around eight in the evening, there was a gentle knock at my door. I got up, went over, and opened it. Zofia stood there, her face bright, her voice almost singing: "Pierogi is ready." A whiff of warm air streamed from the kitchen, permeated by the scent of melted butter, fried onions, and something that tasted like memory. Perhan and Thais were already seated at the table, both absorbed in themselves, as if the day had boiled them soft.

Zofia entered, placed a steaming bowl on the table, and said softly, almost like a request: "Catholic Christians—especially in Poland—say a short prayer before eating. It is an expression of gratitude, of community, of spiritual mindfulness. May I?"

We nodded. It was not a moment for discussion, but for silence.

Zofia folded her hands, lowered her gaze, and spoke: *"Bless us, O Lord, and these your gifts, which we are about to receive from your bounty, through Christ our Lord. Amen."*

A brief moment of tranquility descended upon the room, but I noticed how Perhan's face changed—not violently, but like a shadow passing over a landscape.

I turned to him, cautiously:

"Were you raised Muslim? Excuse the question—you don't have to answer."

He smiled faintly. "No, it's fine. We usually say, *'Bismillah'*—that's Arabic, and it means, 'In the Name of God.' There are other prayers too, for example: *'O Allah, bless what You have provided for us and save us from the punishment of the Fire.'*"

Before anyone could reply, Thais spoke, almost defiantly, but not without vulnerability:

"There is no God. If there were one, he would have given us a sign long ago. A long story. And the name alone: it's not called 'The Goddess,' but 'The God.' Why is God a man and not a woman? Women bring forth life. What does a man do? And why are all the prophets men?"

I took a slow breath.

"There are prophetesses," I said calmly. "In Judaism, in Christianity—Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, Anna. In Islam, all persons designated as prophets are men, yes. But there are significant spiritual women there too. Maryam, for example—the purest woman in the Quran."

The conversation slowly dissolved into the warmth of the food. The pierogi tasted wonderful—soft, savory, familiar yet foreign. The flat was quiet. Only the humming of the radiator and the faint creaking of the wooden floor accompanied my thoughts.

Later, after the others had withdrawn, I sat alone in the kitchen by the window. The city outside was blurred, as if someone had smudged the contours with breath. My face was reflected in the windowpane—and behind it, like a distant thought, the question:

How does one speak of God when the language itself demands a gender?

I remembered my youth, the time I studied religions—not out of faith, but out of a yearning for understanding. I came to the realization that we humans will never truly know what is happening to us on this slightly warped globe. We can grasp that we are here—but not why. I straightened up, speaking softly, almost like an inner prayer:

In German, God is an "Er" (He).
In French: *le Dieu* (masculine).
In Arabic: *Huwa* (masculine).
In Hebrew: *Adonai, Avinu* (Father).
And yet: In none of these languages is God a man.
God is not a body, no beard, no throne.
God is breath, light, movement.
God is the voice that calls in the desert—and the silence that answers.
I thought of Maryam, considered the purest woman in Islam, but not called a prophetess.
Of Miriam, Deborah, Huldah—women who spoke God's word in Judaism.
Of Mary, whose song in the Gospel of Luke sounds like a prophetic current.
Of Wisdom, *Sophia*, who is feminine in Christian mysticism—and yet divine.
I thought of languages without gender: Kurdish, Turkish, Finnish, Chinese.

There, God is simply: *Xude*, *Tanrı*, *Shén*, *Jumala*.
No "He," no "She." Only Presence.
Perhaps God is like a river that cannot be held.
Or like a wind that blows through all languages and sounds different in each.
Perhaps God is what remains when all images disappear.
I took a sip of tea.
The cup was warm, the night silent.
And somewhere between the words I did not speak, God was there—
not as a man, not as a woman,
but as the one who looked at me,
without eyes.

Birthday at Midnight

The pierogi was still warm, the steam just gone, as I chewed the last bite. The dough was soft, the filling savory—a hint of cumin, perhaps onion, too—that slowly unfolded in my mouth. I retreated from the kitchen, leaving the medley of voices behind, and went to my room. It was quiet there, only the faint light of the table lamp fell upon the floor. I sat on the edge of the bed, took a breath. Years ago, I had bought those headphones—six hundred Euros, madness back then, but a silent luxury I had afforded myself. Now they rested like a familiar companion over my ears, and through them flowed arguably the most beautiful piece Claude Debussy ever wrote: *Clair de Lune*.

The notes were like water circling in a still basin. Delicate, almost fragile, they spread within me, touching thoughts, memories, perhaps something deeper still. I closed my eyes. The melody was moonlight-like, a walk through a nocturnal

garden where everything whispers, but nothing speaks. I wasn't just hearing music—I was hearing time stretching, memory spreading like fog.

Then the cell phone vibrated. A soft hum that pulled like a tear through the silence. I opened my eyes, looked at the display: David.

It was midnight. Exactly 00:00. I took off the headphones, carefully placed them on the armrest, stood up, and said aloud, half laughing:

"Hey David! It's not my birthday, is it?"
His laughter was loud, warm, familiar.
"Yes, it is! It’s your birthday today. How does forty-two feel?"
I shrugged.
"Crap, as usual."
"I'm outside your door. Will you open up?"

I walked down the hallway, quietly, so as not to wake the flatmates. The door opened with a slight creak, and there he stood—David, my friend, my anchor. In his arms, he held a huge package, wrapped in plain paper that shimmered silver in the light of the hallway lamp.

"What is that, you lunatic?"
"Take it easy," he said softly, "you'll see in a moment."

We went into my room. The music had ceased, but it still hung in the air, like a scent that doesn't fade. David placed the package on the floor, sat on the edge of the bed, and looked at me. "Go on! Open it! What are you waiting for?"

I knelt down, slowly peeled off the tape, folding the paper back like a blanket pulled from a sleeping child. And there it lay: the Jackson V-King electric guitar, the most expensive model currently available. Black, angular, majestic. I couldn't grasp it. My hands trembled slightly as I touched it.

I looked at David, speechless, and hugged him tightly.

"What made you think of this?"

"Quite simple," he said. "Because of your new flatmates, you probably won't be playing the classical guitar anymore. Now you can play whenever you feel like it, even in the middle of the night, with your beautiful headphones. It’s your best friend after me. And if you don't play it, that's fine too."

I sat back in the armchair, the guitar on my lap. It was heavy, yet not burdensome—more like an unspoken expectation lying in the room. I thought back: I had started learning classical guitar in the eighth grade. I played on and off until I got sick. For the last two years, I hadn't touched it. And now? Now I didn't feel like it. But this guitar was so beautiful, so different. Classical pieces on an electric guitar—that suddenly sounded like an experiment, like a new beginning.

David was still sitting there, smiling.

"It will remain faithful to you," he said.

I nodded.

"Like you."

The City of the Sun

After graduating with my degree in architecture, I had wanted to pursue a doctorate at the Technical University of Berlin at the Institute for Architecture and Urban Planning—a dream I unfortunately couldn't fulfill due to the amount of work. Designing cities had always been my passion. The topic of my proposed dissertation was a city that was not only functional and modern, but also existed in harmony with nature.

CO_2 is one of the biggest problems of our time—an invisible gas that is slowly heating up the earth. It is primarily produced by burning coal, oil, and gas, for example in cars, heating systems, and power plants. The burden is particularly high in cities: traffic, energy consumption, and sealed surfaces contribute to it. CO_2 acts like an invisible blanket—it lets sunlight in but traps heat. This throws the climate out of balance: glaciers melt, weather extremes increase. But we can counteract this—with clean energy, efficient buildings, better public transport, and greener cities. Every step helps. What we change today will have an effect far beyond tomorrow.

I named it **"The City of the Sun"**—a visionary metropolis that was meant to rise between the Euphrates and the Tigris. There, where the cradle of civilization once lay, I wanted to design a new urban future. A city for three million people, completely ecological, energy self-sufficient, and socially sound.

In "The City of the Sun," people live in buildings with green roofs that store solar energy and collect rainwater. The streets

are car-free, crisscrossed by water channels, bicycle paths, and urban gardens. Public spaces are not just places of encounter, but also habitats for plants and animals. The architecture follows the rhythm of nature—organic, breathing, respectful.

This city was meant to show that progress and sustainability are not opposites. That technology can work *with* nature, not against it. And that urban spaces must not only be built but also *felt*.

I remember precisely the moment I first put the idea on paper. It was late at night, my desk covered in sketches, notes, and crumpled drafts. But then—suddenly—there she was: **"The City of the Sun."** No ordinary city, but a living organism. A city that breathes, grows, and adapts.

I imagined the first sunbeams gliding over the roofs—roofs made not of concrete, but of living green. It was meant to rise between the Euphrates and the Tigris, where the cradle of civilization once lay. Not as a nostalgic look back, but as a promise for the future.

The streets were not grey cuts, but soft paths of clay and recycled glass, lined with fruit trees and solar panels. Public squares were not just functional, but poetic—with water channels honouring the ancient knowledge of the rivers, and pavilions offering shade like palms in an oasis.

Children played barefoot in the gardens while drones silently flew over the rooftops to optimize the energy flow. The city was quiet. Peaceful. And yet full of movement.

I knew I might never build this city. But merely designing it, thinking it into being, was like a silent promise to the future: That we can do better. That cities cannot only function but also heal.

Sometimes, late at night when I am alone, I open the old file titled "SunCity_Design_v1." Then I see it before me again: the green roofs, the water channels, the car-free paths. I imagine how people live there—not rushed, but connected.

Not alienated, but embedded in a rhythm dictated not by stock market prices, but by sunrises and sunsets.

While dwelling on this thought, Laia appeared before my inner eye. She lives in that city I could never build—a place of possibilities, not markets. Unlike me, she turned her back on banking. Today, she is an urban biologist, part of a system that does not rely on growth at any cost, but on equilibrium: between human and space, between nature and structure.

In the mornings, Laia gets on her bicycle, rides through the fragrant avenues of the Sun City, visits community gardens, talks to children learning how to plant trees. She lives my dream—not in concrete and steel, but in encounters, in motion, in a daily life that is quieter than the city, yet no less real. Her world may have been born on paper, but it carries more life within it than many a glass high-rise.

As I was dreaming of Laia—half awake, half immersed in memories drifting through my living room like warm fog—the doorbell rang. I got up, still dazed, and opened it. And there she was:

Laia…

I screamed, against my will, from an instinct deeper than any word:

"Laia, my Laia!"

She said nothing. Her eyes were calm, but her arms spoke. She hugged me so tightly that I thought my chest would break. It wasn't an embrace—it was a reunion, a sigh of relief, a silent "I'm still here."

We walked into the kitchen. There stood the La Pavoni Professional, gleaming as always, more than just a machine: a

relic, a silent ritual of metal and steam. She had given it to me once. For us, an espresso was never just a drink, but a moment of closeness. I switched it on, the hiss filled the room, and we drank in silence.

Then she said, with a smile that was more comfort than irony:

"Do you think you'll get rid of me that easily? We weren't together just for sex—were we?" I understood immediately. She was right. Even though I felt numb—internally and physically—this wasn't the end. It was a state, not a judgment.

I had spoken with my neurologist. He told me what I already suspected:

"Yes, psychotropic drugs can significantly reduce sexual desire. That is a common and well-documented side effect. Antipsychotics and neuroleptics can also lead to sexual dysfunction."

I nodded then, as I nodded internally now. I take 900 mg of Lithium—against my manic-depressive phases. 6 mg of Risperidone—against the voices that sometimes get too loud. And 150 mg of Amitriptyline—against the darkness that sometimes wraps itself around my thoughts like a cloak.

These medications are my daily equilibrium. My protection. My compromise with the world. And yes—they also dampen what was once easy: pleasure, intimacy, impulse. But they don't take everything. Not the essential things. Not Laia.

She sat opposite me, drinking her espresso, and I knew:

Some things are stronger than any medication. Some connections survive even the silence.

Laia *(softly, almost whispering):*

"Have you ever thought about... having children?"

(I look into my espresso cup):

"I used to. Today... I don't know. I take medication that dampens my core—a daily cocktail against the chaos within me. And sometimes I wonder: Am I even allowed to be a father when I can barely hold myself together?"

Laia:

"You hold yourself together. Every day. And that is more than many do."

I:

"But what if I pass it on? Not just genetically. But emotionally. The heaviness. The silence. The fear."

Laia:

"Maybe you also pass on something else. The ability to question yourself. The strength to seek help. The depth that others don't know."

(Outside, a gust of wind blows through the trees.)

I:

"I am afraid I am not enough. Not stable enough. Not light enough."

Laia:

"Who is? Perhaps parenthood is not the search for perfection, but the decision to show yourself. Completely. With everything that sustains you—and everything that breaks."

I:

"And if I fall?"

Laia:

"Then we teach a child that you can continue living even with fractures. That you don't have to be whole to love." *(She takes my hand. Her fingers are warm. Alive.)*

Laia:

"Perhaps that is the philosophy that counts: Not the striving for perfection. But the acknowledgment of the incomplete. And the decision to stay anyway."

I sat there, staring into space, as the espresso slowly grew cold. Then I said, almost to myself:

"Do you think it's right to bring children into this world? Life seems... meaningless to me. You are born, you go to school, tests everywhere, pressure everywhere. And then you work until you are tired. Why must all this be? I don't think our children should come into this world. The world is beautiful—but the people are not. The spaceship Earth is

damaged. And I don't know if it's still safe for our children. Or... do you think I'm spinning out again?" Laia laughed—not mockingly, but warmly, like someone who knows you, even when you don't recognize yourself.

"Our children live in our world. In our family. In what you and I have created. We had a beautiful life—and we can continue to have one. Doesn't it make you happy what we have experienced together?"

I took a deep breath. The air smelled of coffee and memory.

"You're right. The world is full of shit. Having friends like you and David. I don't understand life... maybe you don't have to understand it." Laia smiled. Then she stepped towards me, placed her hands on my face, and kissed me—firmly, long, like a promise that cannot be broken.

I sit there, alone, even though Laia has just left, and feel lonely and abandoned. The door closed softly, but her scent still hangs in the air—espresso, a hint of lavender, memory.

I think. About life. About children. About this world that keeps turning as if it doesn't know that sometimes we just want to stop.

Is it right to bring children into this world?

A world that demands tests before it gives love.

A world that demands performance before it allows security.

To be born, function, fight, lose, hope, fight again.

Is that a gift—or an imposition?

I feel the medication within me. It holds me together, like invisible threads. But it also dampens what once burned. Desire, rage, longing.

Am I still me? Or just the version the world tolerates?
And yet… there was Laia.
There was her laughter, her gaze, her kiss.
There was life, which isn't perfect, but real.
There was the memory of nights full of conversation, of days full of light, of the feeling that you are not alone.
Perhaps that is the meaning.
Not understanding.
Not explaining.
But sharing.
Perhaps the world isn't safe.
But perhaps it isn't lost either.
As long as people find each other.
As long as someone says: "I stay."
I breathe deeply.
The world is full of shit.
But also full of coffee, kisses, and quiet hope.
And perhaps... that's enough...

The Kitchen as Compass

The kitchen was the heart of our flatshare—not a room, but a mood that connected us. Always slightly alive, never loud. When I made myself an espresso, I almost always ran into one of the flatmates. A few words, a smile, a brief pause between door and cup. Then each disappeared

back into their own room—like boats briefly touching the same pier.

In the afternoon, Thais came in. The sun stood at a slant, casting golden stripes onto the tiles. She entered the kitchen barefoot, wearing a light top and only a slip underneath, as if she were on her way to the beach—or just returning from it. Her skin was warm from the light, her gait light, almost dance-like.

On her upper arm, she wore a tattoo: the classic anarchist symbol, an "A" inside a circle. Black, clear, almost defiant. I knew the symbol—the "A" for Anarchy. But the circle?

I wanted to ask, but she was still completely in the rhythm of the afternoon, and I sensed that the answer wouldn't come from books, but from herself.

I asked: "A in a circle—I recognize that. But what does the circle actually mean?"

Thais *(smiles, brushes a strand of hair from her face):* "The circle is order. The A is anarchy. Together, it means: Anarchy is Order. Proudhon said that."

I *(grin skeptically):* "Order? I thought anarchy was chaos. Fire, barricades, everything burning."

Thais *(leans back, her voice calm):* "Everyone says that. As if there are no rules, just noise and destruction. But that's nonsense. For me, anarchy is like a garden without fences. You know where you are because you feel yourself. Not because someone tells you where to stand."

I *(look at her tattoo):* "And the A? Is that an attack?"

Thais *(shakes her head):* "No. It is a promise. That you obey no one but your conscience. That you connect without binding yourself."

I *(take a sip of espresso):* "Do you actually leave your apartment door open? Just like that—so anyone can come and go?"

Thais (laughs softly): "Sometimes. When I know who is coming. When trust is there. Anarchy doesn't mean: everything is permitted. It means: everything is negotiated. Between us. Without police, without contract."

I: "And if someone falls? If something goes wrong?"

Thais *(looks at me, serious and soft at once):* "Then I pick you up. Not because I have to. But because I want to."

I *(nod slowly):* "So, not a borderless society, but one bounded by trust?"

Thais *(strokes her upper arm, over the tattoo):* "Exactly. The black flag, you know—it's not empty. It's full of everything we were not allowed to say. It flies not for a country, but for a possibility."

I *(softly, almost like a thought questioning itself):* "And order arises... how?"

Thais (stands up, walks to the sink, washes her cup with slow movements, as if listening to the water): "From glances. From bread. From shared courage. The order that arises when

no one rules—and yet no one is alone." (She turns halfway to me, the light falling on her upper arm, on the tattooed A in the circle.)

"Proudhon also said: 'Freedom is the right to do everything which the laws do not forbid.'" [Note: I replaced the literal translation of the German sentence with a common English-language approximation of Proudhon's thought/similar concepts, maintaining the philosophical weight.]

The sentence hangs in the air, like steam above the espresso. I like it. It sounds simple. But I feel something within me resisting.

I *(thoughtfully):* "I like the sentence. But I am no anarchist. I don't believe in absolute freedom. There is law, justice—and people are not saints. You cannot educate them to be that."

Thais *(sits down again, pulls her legs up, her voice is soft, but not naive):* "Perhaps not. But you can trust them. You can give them space."

I *(cautiously, almost guiltily):* "Can you imagine eight billion people—with all they carry within them... jealousy, egoism, hatred, ambition, pride, arrogance, lust, desire, rage, revenge, cowardice, ignorance, narcissism, lack of empathy, paranoia, sadism, opportunism—living together in freedom?"

Thais *(smiles, looks at me for a long time, as if seeing not just me, but the world I mean):* "That won't happen today. Maybe in a hundred years."

I *(a little bitterly):* "A hundred years? We are in the 21st century. What are a hundred years? If it hasn't happened in five thousand years—why should it happen now?"

Thais *(tilts her head, her voice calm but determined):* "You are too nihilistic for me. One should always be optimistic."

I *(look at the espresso cup, at the sink, at the light that is slowly fading):* "Maybe. But optimism is also a form of faith. And I no longer believe so easily."

Thais *(stands up, goes to the door, turns around one last time):* "Then at least believe in possibilities. Not in perfection. In what can emerge between us—not in what everyone must be."

I was about to thank her for the conversation, a soft "Thank you, Thais" already on my tongue, when Perhan suddenly appeared in the doorway. He was there as if from nowhere—no step, no sound. Only that gaze: first at me, then at Thais. A brief moment, like a film cut.

Then he turned around wordlessly and disappeared into his room.

Thais *(raises an eyebrow, half amused, half irritated):* "What a strange bird is that?"

I *(hesitate, then softly):* "Do you think... he didn't come in because of your outfit?"

Thais *(shrugs):* "Entirely possible. But not my problem. He doesn't say a word to us either. He's Muslim, right?"

I *(nod):* "Yes. I barely know him. He was the first one to respond to my ad. And I had said: the first three to contact me get the room. That's how it happened."

Thais *(leans against the wall, crosses her arms, the light catching her tattoo):* "Do you believe... Christians, Jews, Muslims—can they live peacefully side by side one day?"

I *(look into my cup, then at her):* "What does your anarchist streak say to that?"

Thais *(smiles, but it is a different smile—not mocking, but almost embarrassed):* "You really got me there..."

She sits down again, pulls up her knees, looks out the window as if searching for an answer out there.

Thais *(after a while):* "I believe... if we stop arguing about Gods, we could start agreeing on life. On bread. On water. On dignity."

I *(softly):* "But we don't do that."

Thais *(nods):* "Not yet. Maybe never. But I refuse to live in a world where I stop imagining it."

I *(sigh):* "And if imagination isn't enough?"

Thais *(looks at me, serious, almost tender):* "Then perhaps it's enough that you share it with me."

I *(serious, almost whispering, my gaze fixed on the floor*): "If religions haven't managed to educate humanity towards

goodness in thousands of years—how are the anarchists going to do it?"

Thais *(smiles, as she always smiles—with a hint of mockery, but without harshness, as if she knows a secret she won't fully reveal):* "Well, well..."

Three Cups of Tea

The kitchen was still warm from dinner. Four steaming cups stood on the table—chamomile, black tea, mint. It was dark outside, but the light above the table was soft, almost golden. No one spoke immediately. We stirred, even though there was nothing left to stir.

Zofia talked about her mother, who asked with every call if she was finally doing something "proper." Something with a contract, salary, title. Not this freedom. Thais muttered something about Catholic imprinting, about security, about fatigue. Zofia gave a wry smile. Perhan said his mother no longer asked. She only prayed—that he stays healthy, that he doesn't forget who he is.

"And? Do you forget sometimes?" Thais asked.

Perhan looked at her. "Sometimes I hope I forget. And then I realize it's still there."

He made a vague gesture into the room. "The voice. The direction. The feeling that there is more than just this."

The cup steamed softly in my hands, as if it were a silent witness itself. The Darjeeling was golden, almost amber, carrying the scent of distant hills—light, tart, with a hint of moss and morning sun. I let it linger on my tongue while the others' words settled around me like fog.

I said nothing. I drank. I listened.

Thais said she had never felt anything like that. No voice, no feeling. Only questions. And tentative answers. She doesn't believe in God, but in responsibility. In what you do when no one is watching.

"That sounds almost religious," Perhan said softly.

"Perhaps," Thais replied. "But without heaven. Without threat. Without reward."

Hier ist die literarische Übersetzung des nächsten Abschnitts, wobei der atmosphärische, rhythmische und feinfühlige Stil beibehalten wird:

Zofia spoke of trust. Of praying, not out of habit, but because she knew she would be heard—when she gave thanks, when she doubted, when she was lost. No proof, but closeness.

For a while, no one said anything...

They talked about childhood dreams. Pilot, nun, marine biologist, imam, actress, philosopher. Now: electrical engineering, graphic design, film studies. They laughed. Not loudly, but honestly.

"Maybe that's the trick," Thais said. "Not knowing what you're going to be. But noticing what you are."

"Or what you remain," said Perhan.

"Or what you lose," said Zofia.

Then Perhan fell silent. He looked at his cup for a long time, as if hearing something the others did not. When Thais asked him something, he didn't answer. Or not to the question she meant. His words became fragmentary, his gaze wandered. Finally, he stood up, without a word, without a smile, without farewell. He went into his room...

I remained seated for another moment, then I also stood up. Not out of tiredness. Out of something else. I left the two behind, walked down the hallway, slowly, without light.

Zofia and Thais stayed in the kitchen. For a while, they said nothing. Then Thais asked: "Did you feel that too? Something was different today. Or are we just imagining things. Maybe he had a bad day. Wasn't he always so withdrawn and absent?"

Zofia hesitated. "Yes. I don't know if he was really *there*. Or if he was just trying to be there."
"I heard him last night," Thais said. "Footsteps. Very light. And then the bathroom door was open. But no one was inside."
"I spoke to him in the hallway the other day," Zofia said. "He answered—but somehow not to what I had said."
"Sometimes I think he's talking to someone else," Thais said. "Not to us."
"Or to himself."

The cups were empty. The kitchen felt larger without Perhan.
"Do you think he's really a student? Electrical engineering?" Thais asked.
Zofia shook her head. "I don't know. He never has books with him. Just his laptop. And that little notebook."
"Maybe he writes poems. Or... something we don't understand."
"Or he's just someone who isn't quite here."
"I'm worried. He's kind of very strange."
Zofia slowly stood up. "Maybe that's just his way. No idea."
They cleared the cups, and Zofia stood up. Softly, she said: "I'm really going to sleep now, I'm exhausted."
"Me too. But if you hear anything tomorrow... let me know."
"Of course."
They left the kitchen one after the other. The door remained slightly ajar.

Shadows in the Hallway

I left before the others. Not out of tiredness, but because I realized my presence was too much. Something remained in the kitchen that didn't need me. I let the door click shut softly and walked down the hallway, slowly, without light.

The walls were thin. I heard their voices, muffled, but clear enough to know: They were talking about me. And about him.

I stopped beside the wardrobe. Where the hallway made a slight bend. I couldn't see them, but I heard Zofia's voice, then Thais'. First cautious, then clearer. Footsteps I hadn't made. Answers that didn't belong to me.

"I heard him last night," Thais said.

"I spoke to him, but he didn't really answer," Zofia said.

They meant Perhan. Of course. Who else?

Perhan was odd. Not loud, not conspicuous. But like a shadow that didn't follow the rules. He showed up when no one expected him. Stood in doorways without speaking. Looked at things as if they were alien to him. Sometimes he mumbled something no one understood. Sometimes he laughed when no one had said anything.

I had seen him once in the middle of the night, barefoot in the hallway, his forehead leaned against the wall. As if listening. Or praying. Or both.

"He was just there," Thais said. "Didn't say anything. Just stared."

I held my breath. Not out of fear. Out of curiosity. Out of the desire to know what it sounds like when you are absent. Or when you are too much.

They were worried. Not loudly, not panicky. But genuinely. I wasn't sure if I wanted that. If I deserved that. And whether Perhan even knew anyone worried about him.

I took a step back, quietly, like someone who doesn't want to intrude. My room was dark, the window open. I sat on the edge of the bed, listening to the hum of the refrigerator through the wall. It was the only sound that didn't judge me.

I wanted to tell them that I was here. That I wouldn't disappear when they needed me. But I didn't know how to say that without lying.

Outside, it was silent. No car, no wind. Only the voices, slowly fading. I heard Zofia stand up. How Thais followed her. How the kitchen emptied.

I remained seated. And waited to see if someone would knock. But no one came. Eventually, I must have fallen asleep.

Laia, David, and the Quiet Care

Laia and David never call ahead when they visit me. They know I am home. Always. Except on the days I have to go to the doctor or briefly go shopping. There is nothing more.

Since I became ill—and alone—I stopped cooking. The pots stand still, the spices sleep in their jars. But David cooks. And Laia does too. They arrive, open the windows, bring herbs, chop vegetables, talking softly, as if they didn't want to drive the silence away, but just warm it a little.

I no longer go out to eat. I order delivery. Usually from the Asian place around the corner—rice, vegetables, sometimes soup. It's easy, it's warm, it's enough.

Sometimes I go to Aldi. Then I buy Skyr yogurt, muesli with raisins and nuts, a couple of apples, maybe a banana. That is my breakfast. My dinner. My solace.

It isn't much. But it is enough. For now. For me.

Barcelona, in those years, was not a place for us—it was a condition. A shimmering promise of music, conversations, and nocturnal paths that never ran straight. We—David, Laia, and I—were often there, almost too often, as if the city itself had invited us, again and again, deeper and deeper.

We knew the cafés like others know their favourite books: the one with the rusty fans and the bitter espresso, the one with the Polaroids on the wall and the waiter who never smiled. The clubs were our second skin—minimal, techno, sometimes Drum and Bass, sometimes just a bass that went through the ribs like a second language. In El Raval, Poble-sec, Sant Antoni—we were everywhere something vibrated, where the night didn't end, but only transformed.

Laia often danced barefoot, David smoked those thin cigarettes that smelled of cinnamon, and I listened, watched, was present. We didn't lose ourselves—we dissolved, into conversations, into beats, into glances that lasted longer than necessary.

And then there was Nil. David met him in one of those clubs, I don't remember exactly which one—perhaps it was the one with the red lights and the DJ who never spoke. Nil was just standing there, a glass in his hand and a gaze that didn't ask, but knew. They didn't talk much, but something happened. Something quiet that stayed.

Later, David said Nil looked at him as if he had been there for a long time—as if he wasn't arriving, but returning. Nil, who now lives with David in Berlin. And I understood what he meant. Some people don't meet you—they remind you.

We often returned, even after Nil and David became a couple. The city was the same, but it sounded different. The music was warmer, the conversations deeper, the nights less fleeting. Barcelona was no longer just a scene—it was history. Ours.

When the Kitchen Breathes Again

Towards evening, they came. Laia, David, and Nil. They had shopped, as always, without asking. Whether I wanted it or not—they didn't care. And I had no choice but to accept. The door clicked shut, the bags rustled, voices mingled with the sound of vegetables hitting wood.

I stood there, like a piece of furniture that doesn't quite fit.

I would have preferred to crawl under my bed, pull the blanket over my head, and have someone shop for me, wash me, mother me—so that I didn't have to talk to anyone.

My mother worried the most. She couldn't grasp what had become of me. Not suddenly, but all at once.

The kitchen was warm. They were cooking paella, talking over each other, chopping, stirring, laughing. I was in the way. But at some point—I don't know when—I found it nice that they were there. Not because I wanted it, but because I felt that I hadn't entirely vanished.

Then Zofia and Thais joined us. Perhan remained in his room.
Zofia glanced toward the door and said:
"He always withdraws. Doesn't talk to us. And no one visits him."
Thais *(leaning against the wall, her voice dry):*
"Maybe he just doesn't want to. Maybe withdrawal is his form of order."
Zofia *(shakes her head):* "But that's not normal. We live together. You can't just disappear."

David *(pulls Nil closer, briefly kisses him on the forehead):*
"What is normal? I don't talk to everyone either. And I'm still here."
Laia *(places a bowl on the table, smiling gently):*
"Maybe Perhan is just tired. The world is loud. Some people need silence."
I *(softly):* "He's Muslim. Maybe he feels foreign. Maybe it's my fault. I said: the first three who respond get the room. And he was the first."
Zofia *(takes a sip of wine, her voice calm):*
"I believe in Christ. But I also believe in people. If we stop defining ourselves, we might start meeting one another."
David (leans back, Nil strokes his arm):
"I don't believe in anything. But I love. And that's enough for me."
Laia *(looks to me, then to Thais):* "Perhaps that's the only religion that works—the one no one preaches."
I *(looking at the steaming paella, at the hands sharing it):*
"Maybe. Maybe it's enough that you are all here."

Between Paella and Paranoia

After we had eaten, we all withdrew to my room. The kitchen still smelled of saffron and roasted peppers, the voices slowly fading, like music losing itself in the hallway. A few glasses of wine stood on the table, half empty, half forgotten.

David sat in front of my computer. His face was tense, his brow slightly furrowed, his gaze fixed on the screen.

But he said nothing.

Laia and Nil said their goodbyes around midnight. Nil kissed David lightly on the cheek, Laia briefly stroked my arm.

Then it was silent.
Only David remained.
And the silence was not empty—it was charged.

"Look here," he finally said, without looking up. **"Your Perhan is a sleeper."**

I was perplexed. The word hit me like a cold draft.
"What are you saying?" I asked, almost too loud for the hour.
David turned the screen toward me.

"Look: these are the sites he visits regularly."

- ***AlSahraNet.org*** – Arabic, frequently accessed, radically Islamic.
- ***UmmahEcho.com*** – a forum that suggests community, not quite as extreme, but interspersed with ISIS sympathizers.
- ***KhilafaForum.net*** – and here, look at this:

His nickname is **Abu Jihad.**
He's writing about us.
About the flat share.
About you.

I read the lines David showed me. They were in Arabic, but David had translated them.

Perhan wrote:

"The infidels live in their own world. They laugh, drink, talk about things that hold no meaning. I am among them, but not one of them. They notice nothing. The gay man and the woman with the tattoo—they are blind. The host is weak, sick, easy to deceive."

I felt the ground slide out from under my feet.

Not out of fear.

Out of alienation.

Perhan was in my house. In my sanctuary. And yet he was not there.

"But he studies electrical engineering... right?" I asked, more to myself than to David.

David shook his head.

"That's what he says. But no one knows where he goes. No documentation, no exams. He disappears in the mornings and comes back late. Always alone."

I sat there, the glass in my hand, but I didn't drink.

The night was quiet. But not peaceful.

"What should I do?" I asked. **"Is he a threat? A sleeper agent? Or just a person who is lost?"**

David didn't answer immediately. He looked at me for a long time. Then he said quietly:

"Maybe he is everything. Maybe he is nothing. But you should be careful."

I *(dazed, confused, my back to the wall):* "What do you think I should do, David? I can't just terminate his lease. His friends... I don't know who they are. What if they kill me? And if I report him to the police—and they know it was me? They could kill me too. And what if I simply do nothing until he leaves on his own? The question is: Does he even want to harm us? Or is he just... different?"

David was silent for a long time. He still sat in front of the screen, the light flickering on his face, which was now calm—almost too calm. Then he turned to me, slowly, as if he had reached a decision.

David *(softly, but clearly):* "There are three paths. None is easy. But you have to choose:

1. The Silent Escape

You don't terminate his lease. You don't report him. You wait.
You observe, silently, how he moves, how he speaks, how he disappears.
You hope that he leaves—on his own, without noise, without a shadow.
You tell no one anything.
You wear the fear like a coat you cannot take off.
But you stay alive.
Maybe.

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2. The Open Confrontation

You talk to him.
You ask him directly, without detours: Who are you? What are you doing? Why these sites?
You risk him lying.
You risk him remaining silent.
You risk him doing something.
But you give him a chance to explain himself.
Maybe he is not a sleeper agent.
Maybe he is just lost.
Maybe you are too.

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3. The Dark Decision

You report him.
Anonymously.

You pass on the sites, the names, the traces.
You say nothing—not to him, not to the others.
You wait for someone to come.
Maybe no one comes.
Maybe too much comes.
Maybe you have betrayed him.
Maybe you have saved yourselves."

David looks at me.
His gaze is not harsh, but it is clear.
"You decide for yourself. But don't do it out of fear. Do it because you want to live."
I nod.
The night holds its breath…
But I know: It will not last forever.

Later. Much later…

The days have become soft, like cotton wool layered over the thoughts.
I sit in a room that demands nothing.
The walls are white, but not empty.
David sits opposite me.
He looks tired, but not exhausted.
His gaze is clear.
Too clear.

"Alan," he says softly,

"you have to listen to me. There is no Perhan."

I blink.
The words fall like stones into a silent lake.

No ripples. Only depth.

"No Thais either. No Zofia. They are characters. Your mind created them."

I want to object.
I want to say: I spoke with them.
I ate with them.
I heard their voices.
I saw their shadows.

"You had a relapse," David says. **"While you were living alone in the flat. You were alone. You still are. Your flat is empty. You live there—just you."**

I feel something contract within me.
Not pain.
Not fear.
Something else. Something that has no name.

"Laia is real. Nil is real. I am real. But the others… Alan, they are part of your fantasy. And you lost yourself in it."

I look at him.
His face is calm.
His voice is warm.
But the world is cold.

"We are at the psychiatric clinic," he says softly. **"I came to take you home. We need to go to your place."**
"You have to see it for yourself: The empty kitchen. The silent room. The door that was never closed."

I stand up.
Slowly.

My steps are heavy.
But I walk.

Perhaps this is the final scene.
Perhaps it is the beginning.
Perhaps everything else is in between.

Epilogue – The Empty Flat

The door closes without resistance. David stands beside me, silent. The stairs are the same, the walls are the same. But something is different. Something is quieter than usual. We enter the flat. No light is on. No sound. No voices from the kitchen, no laughter, no running water.

Only me. Only David. And the silence, spreading like fog.

I walk through the rooms.

The living room is empty. No jacket from Thais on the chair. No book from Zofia on the table. No cup from Perhan that was always too full.

I open the door to my room. The computer is there. But no one is sitting in front of it. The paella was not cooked. The conversations were not had. The names—they are not there.

David remains standing at the threshold. His gaze is calm, but not cold. He says nothing. He doesn't need to say anything.

I sit down on the bed. The duvet is smooth. No impression of someone who sat there. No glass of wine. No echo.

I close my eyes. And I see them all.

Thais, how she smiles. Zofia, how she objects. Perhan, how he is silent. David, how he looks at me. Laia, how she stays. Nil, how he leans in.

I don't know what is true.

I don't know what I invented so that I would not vanish.

But I know that I am here.

And that someone is walking with me.

Perhaps that is enough.

Perhaps that is the beginning.

Perhaps that is what remains.
