

Your phone rings. It's Julia.

JULIA: "Hey, I'm outside your  
a[incomprehensible]"

YOU: "My apartment?"

JULIA: "Yeah."

YOU: "OK, see you in a minute."

You're ready for this trip. You've been ready, for 20 minutes. Julia is not precisely on time. You get your bag packed with all the necessities and open the apartment door, close it and lock it and walk out to the curb and the car. You open the passenger side door and enter...

#### INTERIOR OF JULIA'S CAR

Julia drives a compact car from a bygone decade. The inside is normally scattered with papers and whatever else, but has been cleaned up for this trip. Possibly this clean-up job is the reason why Julia is a little late. The car smells a little like Julia and a lot like the jar of potpourri she has in there.

JULIA (when you point to it): It makes it smell like Christmas, like when I was a little girl.

The fabric on the ceiling of the car sags around one of the edges. Fortunately the ceiling has one of those handles you can hold, to give your hand something to do on a long car ride. You buckle up.

YOU: Yeah, I remember potpourri. Potpourri came before incense.

JULIA: Yeah. You're buckled now. Okay, next stop is Brian's place.

Traffic is horrible in a fast, busy, death-inviting way, and you don't want to distract Julia as she tries to keep you both alive. After about ten minutes, you arrive in front of Brian's apartment. He's waiting in front, wearing sunglasses and standing on one foot. He gets his backpack and puts it on as he walks over to the passenger side door.

This old car is a coupe, so you get out and make the seat go forward and Brian sits in the back, putting his backpack at his feet. He's a little less than average height for an American man, and he's a good sport.

YOU: Hey Brian. Ready for the adventure?

BRIAN: The adventure is constantly underway.

YOU: Are you ready for this side quest?

BRIAN: Yeah. I brought sunscreen in case anyone needs it.

You three are going to Alte Stadt, the site of the original Hoheres Wesen, from which all of Hoheres Wesen eventually extruded. It's just a little ways away. It looks like you'll be stuck in traffic for an hour and a half.

There are two ways to get to Alte Stadt from the part of town where the three of you live. You can take the bus, or you can drive. If you really want you can take the light rail, but you end up having to make more connections than the bus, so it doesn't save you any time. If you drive, you'll be stuck in traffic. The driver will switch her foot from gas to brakes, over and over, as you dutifully move yourselves forward, as a dutiful particle within the flow. You're only doing what anyone else would do. If you take the bus, you can travel in relative comfort, but because you have to wait for the bus, and then make a connection, and the bus gets stuck in traffic itself, anyway, you end up taking two and a half hours instead of one and a half. Pretty soon there isn't very much day left at the destination.

Actually, if you really wanted to, you could ride a bike there. But you can't go on the interstate if you ride a bike, and it ends up taking a long time.

As long as all these modes of transportation take, they are all faster than walking.

You three weighed your options and Julia was willing to drive the rest of you. Hopefully there will be parking.

JULIA: Okay, on the freeway now. Do you guys mind if I turn up my music?

YOU: No, that's okay.

BRIAN: Yeah, that's fine.

YOU: Actually, I brought a CD, if you want to hear it later.

JULIA: What is it?

YOU: It's a Suzanne Vega CD.

JULIA: Sure, let's play it now.

You get it out of the case and put it in the car's CD player.

JULIA: Are you a Suzanne Vega fan?

YOU: I was at the record store one afternoon, and I saw this CD. I remembered the name from when I was a kid. I think I liked one of her songs on the radio.

JULIA: Is it on this CD?

YOU: There's something familiar about a couple of the tracks, so maybe yeah. It's from the right time period to be something I heard in elementary school.

BRIAN: Are you a Suzanne Vega fan now?

YOU: I like this CD alright. Maybe I will become a Suzanne Vega fan.

The three of you are sailing along nicely until you all hit traffic.

YOU: What are we going to do when we get to Alte Stadt?

BRIAN: You have say it the German way. Alte Stadt. [He says "All-tuh Shtat"]

YOU: Do you know a lot of German?

BRIAN: Just what I read in philosophy books. I got curious one time and tried to teach myself to pronounce it right, but I don't think I really have it. The "sh" in Stadt I got from hearing people pronounce Wittgenstein ["Vit gin shtine" (hard "g")].

JULIA: Is he a philosopher?

BRIAN: Yeah.

YOU: What was his philosophy about?

BRIAN: I never really read him much but it was something about how language works. We play games with language, and that's where meaning comes from. Or something like that.

JULIA: Kind of like how you can figure out that someone is being sarcastic?

BRIAN: Yeah... I think so. Not sure if Wittgenstein ever talked about that.

JULIA: Or like when people say the same word over and over, and nobody really means it anymore.

BRIAN: Like because they don't act on it, it doesn't really mean anything?

JULIA: Like if people talk about how good love is, but they don't mean it anymore. So you can say that love is good, and people can agree with you,

but the word "good" doesn't mean "people are going to be into this" anymore.

BRIAN: Yeah. That's something Wittgenstein might have talked about.

JULIA: I like this guy Wittgenstein. Witt-gen-stein ["Vit - gin - shtine"]. How is that spelled?

BRIAN: W I T T G E N S T E I N

JULIA: Oh, so not Wittgenstein? ["Vit - jen - shtine"]

BRIAN: No, I think in German "g"s are usually "hard".

JULIA: So the word "German" isn't a German word?

BRIAN: I don't think so. The German word for "German" is "Deutsche".

JULIA: How is that spelled?

BRIAN: D E U T S C H E

JULIA: That's an interesting spelling.

(For some reason, you're not as interested in German pronunciation and you look out the window at the nearby car stuck in traffic. But you can't help hearing and attending to what's happening in the car.)

BRIAN: Yeah, the "e u" pair makes an "oy" sound.

JULIA: So the Teutonic ["Too tawn ic"] knights

should really be called the Teutonic ["Toy tawn ic"] knights?

BRIAN: I don't know. I think the word is pronounced Teutonic ["Too tawn ic"]. What were they?

JULIA: I don't know, I just remember that my brother was part of, like, a nation of LARPerS, or a guild or a clan or something, called the Teutonic Knights.

BRIAN: Huh... How far back in the past do your pasts go, if that makes sense?

JULIA: I think all the pasts I have could be from people who are alive now. I've never had pasts that go back more than 80 years. But it's hard to tell because childhood memories are kind of fuzzy.

BRIAN: Okay. You must pick up a lot of random knowledge from your pasts.

JULIA: That was my real brother! He really liked LARPing.

BRIAN: Does he still do it?

JULIA: Not anymore. He's too busy now.

BRIAN: That's too bad.

JULIA: Yeah, but he's happy anyway. Yeah, I do learn a lot of things, but I also forget them because there are so many to remember. There's a lot of different things in my mind all at once.

BRIAN: But you just say one thing at a time.

JULIA: Yeah, usually.

BRIAN: Like quantum physics. A particle is doing whatever it wants until the wave function collapses and then it's one thing.

JULIA: Is that what quantum physics is?

BRIAN: I think it's part of it.

JULIA: Wasn't one of the quantum physics people named Heisenberg?

BRIAN: Yeah.

JULIA: How do you spell that?

BRIAN: H E I S E N B E R G

JULIA: That's funny. It's not Heisenberg ["Hey zen burg"]?

BRIAN: No, the "e i" pair is pronounced "eye".

JULIA: Okay. Were any of the other quantum physics guys from Germany? Or have German names?

BRIAN: There's always Schrödinger ["Shrohdinge"].

JULIA: How do you spell that?

BRIAN: S C H R Ö D I N G E R

JULIA: "O umlaut"?

BRIAN: Yeah. I don't think English speakers pronounce Schrödinger's name right.



JULIA: How is it really pronounced?

BRIAN: Schrödinger ["Shruhdinge"]. No, that's not quite right. Okay, "o umlaut" is different than "o". The way you say it is you say "eh" with your lips in the shape of an "o".

JULIA: "Ö"

BRIAN: Right.

JULIA: "Ö ö ö ö"...

BRIAN: Okay, so it's Schrödinger ["Shrödinger"].

JULIA: Schrödinger. ["Shrurdinger"] No. That's not right.

You don't even try to pronounce foreign words.

JULIA: Schrödinger. ["Shrödinger"] I got it! For now. I can see why people don't want to say Schrödinger's ["Shrohdinge's"] name right. Some of them can say it right but some people can't and the ones who can't think that the ones who can are showing off. So then the people who can don't want to look like they're showing off, so they say Schrödinger ["Shrohdinge"] instead. But why do people say Wittgenstein ["Vit gin shtine"] instead of Wittgenstein ["Wit gin stine"]?

BRIAN: I've heard some people say Wittgenstein ["Vit gin stine"]. But most people say Wittgenstein ["Vit gin shtine"].

JULIA: So some people are trying to not show off, but they still say some of the showing-off sounds. But they're not really showing off how they're not

showing off.

BRIAN: Yeah, people try to abide by rules, their own personal rules about what kind of person they want to be. Or how they want to be perceived.

JULIA: You're more the kind of person who obeys the rules that make you who you want to be, rather than the rules that make you be perceived a certain way.

BRIAN: That's what you perceive.

JULIA: Haha, okay, what's the truth then?

BRIAN: Okay, yeah, you're half right. Half the time I obey the rules that make me into the person I want to be. The other half the time I just do what I have to do.

JULIA: Because someone makes you do it?

BRIAN: That's the third half of the time.

Julia laughs. Brian's in her element.

JULIA: I'm just messing with you. I know what you mean. There are some things you just have to do.

YOU: I think for me it's more like there are things that I end up doing.

BRIAN: No, it's definitely like there are things I have to do.

JULIA: Yeah.

YOU: Interesting. Do these things make any sense?

JULIA: They don't have to. They just are.

BRIAN: Yeah.

JULIA: Usually they make sense.

YOU: I think mine make sense, but I think it's because I organize my life around my well-being, so things tend to get woven into some kind of chain of events that leads to my well-being.

BRIAN: I think that sometimes, but sometimes I think it's God.

JULIA: It's definitely the Universe.

YOU: Like there's some kind of intelligence that does it?

JULIA: Yes.

YOU: Or is it because reality is inherently narrative and creates patterns impersonally?

JULIA: Yeah.

YOU: Both of them at different times?

JULIA: All I know is that everything, like the whole universe, is one thing, and it sets things up, and it's not God.

You suddenly realize you need to go the bathroom, but you figure you can hold it.

Julia and Brian go on talking about something, but you tune them out. Suzanne Vega finishes playing and Julia asks you if you have any more CDs. You

reply that you do not.

JULIA: Okay, could you look in the glove box for my adowa CD?

YOU: Adowa?

JULIA: Yeah, it's a burned CD. It says, "Adowa".

You duly search and find it and put it in the CD player, after removing the Suzanne Vega CD and putting it in its case.

A woman sings something by herself, and then a chorus replies, and then the drums begin.

JULIA: This is funeral music. It's dancing music, and it's remembering music.

BRIAN: Funeral music?

JULIA: From West Africa.

BRIAN: It's interesting.

JULIA: I like this way to grieve better.

BRIAN: So if we outlive you, we should play this at your funeral?

JULIA: You can play whatever you want at my funeral. It's your funeral.

They laugh, but being in this car is getting to you.

YOU: Is it okay if I turn up the AC?

BRIAN: I'm fine.

JULIA: I'm okay, but you can adjust the vent.

You forgot about adjusting the vent, after so long not being in cars.

YOU: How much longer?

JULIA: We're through a lot of the traffic. Maybe 40 more minutes?

You calculate -- technically it's not really calculating that you're doing -- that your bladder can hold until you make it to one of Alte Stadt's public restrooms.

YOU: You think that includes the time it would take to find parking?

JULIA: Oh yeah, add another 15 minutes to that.

You recalculate, and because you're stretching a previous yes, you figure you can make it.

Brian and Julia talk about who knows what as you sink into reverie. Alte Stadt... when was the last time you were there? It was probably when you were dating Robert. You wonder if things have changed much there in Alte Stadt. You seem to remember that the company that ran the concessions there left and a new company came in. So maybe the shops would be different. Do you remember the shops specifically? No, not really. They tended to be German-themed.

If it weren't for the fact that you were getting a headache and felt slightly claustrophobic in the car and you had to go to the bathroom, you would be getting relaxed enough in the afternoon sun to go to sleep. You can hear the gratingness of Julia's and Brian's voices either as an irritant or as a file filing away your consciousness. Why are you three going to Alte Stadt today? Oh, it was some comment one of you made about something... something about wanting to learn more about the history of your town... to learn it again... we are always learning the history again... we must choose to revisit our history... sit through traffic for our history... we can't erase everything that was, or live for everything that is to come... we must remember things... Alte Stadt is a strange way to remember things... Alte Stadt is an expensive place, it costs a lot of money to run... Alte Stadt is us trying to remember... You and Robert, in Alte Stadt, eating ice cream... You and Robert, at a bar in Alte Stadt, drinking beers... big beer steins ["shtigns"]... no, you called them steins ["stigns"]... the others there with you... his birthday... walking out on the street next to him, the others walking before and behind... the others gone... who were the others?... you start to remember what they said to you... what they did with what they said to you... you're over it now... Alte Stadt, the past costs so much to remember... only the best of the past... and the worst... that time you went with Robert to Anderson Reservoir...

And your reverie goes on, idle thoughts which you know don't have any inherent relationship to your present-day experiences. Or if they do, they're like cheap talk, they're memories that don't mean what they would have meant when you were younger and you did what you thought, all the time. You know that you're thinking about Robert, and you wonder if that means anything, but Robert is very far away right now, and it's the first time you've thought of him in weeks or even months. You're not entirely sure how long it's been, because you haven't been keeping track.

And then Julia makes it off the freeway, and the ramp dumps you three into downtown Hoheres Wesen.

## DOWNTOWN

Tall buildings, neither skyscrapers nor walk-ups, house people on top of retail. Homeless people, drunk people, lower-income people walk around. Cars that are expensive are going places. Deeper into downtown there are true skyscrapers, buildings too expensive to house poor tenants. People are going places to do things, people are draining the cups of their lives on the ground. You three get stuck behind a bus, and then Julia makes a confident and desperate lane change, speeds ahead of the bus, and slips into a convenient gap to return to the rightmost lane. Alte Stadt is somewhere on the right.

BRIAN: How are you doing, Julia?

JULIA: I'm fine.

BRIAN: I'm okay but I have to go to the bathroom.

YOU: Me too.

JULIA: Well, hopefully we find parking near Alte Stadt.

BRIAN: How was it going through traffic?

JULIA: I'm used to it. My jobs change all the time and I just have to wake up early when they're far from my apartment.

BRIAN: When I'm in traffic, my leg starts to get tired from going from gas to brakes. But this car is a manual transmission, so you have to hold down the clutch, too.

JULIA: Yeah...

BRIAN: I don't think I could do that.

JULIA: You get used to it.

BRIAN: I'd offer to drive back but I'm not good with stick-shift.

YOU: I don't know how to drive stick-shift.

JULIA: Do you have a license?

YOU: Yeah.

JULIA: I guess that's a good thing to have in this city.



She circles around several blocks but can't find any parking.

JULIA: It looks like we're going to have to find a pay lot somewhere and walk.

BRIAN: I've got some cash.

YOU: Me too.

JULIA: Okay.

She finds a pay lot that is somewhat expensive and somewhat far away, and you park, get out, Julia locks her car and pays and you contribute your share and you get on the sidewalk and head toward Alte Stadt.

You feel a measured urgency as you walk toward Alte Stadt, each footfall taking you a few feet closer to the public restrooms of Alte Stadt.

Then you find yourselves entering the gates of Alte Stadt.

## ALTE STADT, EAST GATE

The east gate is a double gate, with an ironwork gate on the outside, and an ironwork gate on the inside.

The outer layer of Alte Stadt consists of outdoor restaurants in the style of Bavarian villages, but built out of adobe. There are a few surviving buildings from the 19th century in Alte Stadt, but many of them are reconstructions done

faithfully in the style of the old days. The German immigrants who founded Alte Stadt by and large were not from Bavaria, but Americans well know what German restaurants are supposed to look like, and Alte Stadt does not call them misinformed. You pass through the east gate, through the inner gate, and enter the Plaza.

## PLAZA

As you enter into Alte Stadt, you see a plaza in a Spanish style. This is an authentic feature, is in fact the very site of the original plaza which they built. The founders liked the plazas they had seen in Mexico City, where they stopped on their way to Alta California.

In the plaza, off to one side, there is an informational sign.

YOU: I see a bathroom over there.

You and Brian head over and you each go into the appropriate bathrooms for your genders.

Having used the bathrooms, you return to Julia, who returns you to the sign.

BRIAN: Let's look at this sign.

YOU: Okay.

BRIAN: "Founded in 1831, Hoheres Wesen was an idealistic experiment led by a pair of German professors, Hans-Georg Müller and Peter Baecker.

Both were inspired by the philosophies of the German Enlightenment, Kant and particularly Hegel among them. They founded a youth movement in the universities where they taught, in Berlin and Jena, drawing in students and young people from other towns and cities as well. Baecker's brother was a frontiersman and somewhat of a con artist, but his descriptions of Alta California were honest enough to not mislead the professors, and they decided that they should leave the decadent European climate to start anew, to create a current of thought in pure isolation which could then return to Europe -- a 'Germany away from Germany, to bless Germany', as their slogan went. After initial problems with their water supply and with disease, the colony took root and grew a little. But subsequent waves of Mexican and American immigration wholly shaped the character of Hoheres Wesen, which only retained the name given by its founders -- Hoheres Wesen. The last native-speaking German speakers, descended from the original band of students, died in the 1950s."

JULIA: There's a button.

BRIAN: "The modern pronunciation of Hoheres Wesen is first attested in a political cartoon from the *Hoheres Wesen Times* in 1921. At that time, the city was not very large. The caption reads "'Have you heard of Hoheres Wesen?' 'Who's Horace Wesson?'"

JULIA: That is how we say it.

BRIAN: "When Hoheres Wesen was annexed to the United States after the Mexican-American War, gradually American settlers caused the pronunciation to shift toward a frontier-ish

'Horace Wesson'. The spelling changed from Höheres Wesen to Hoheres Wesen. But the German-speaking inhabitants called it by its original name, Höheres Wesen. Press the button below to hear how one of them might have pronounced the name to this city which is now home to over four million Americans."

YOU: Okay.

You press the button.

SIGN: Höheres Wesen. ["Höherus Veyzn"]

JULIA: Höheres Wesen. ["Hrrhrrus Veysen"]

You push the button again.

SIGN: Höheres Wesen. ["Höherus Veyzn"]

YOU: Höheres Wesen. ["Huheherus Veysin"] I give up. Hoheres Wesen. ["Horus Wesun"] I'm an American.

JULIA: I was doing better with the ö in the car.

BRIAN: I'm thirsty.

JULIA: I see a water fountain over there.

Brian goes and drinks from it. You can hear in the air the sound of a tuba, drum kit, accordion and saxophone playing "Dust in the Wind". It's not quite schlager style, despite the instrumentation.

Then, as Brian returns, the band starts playing "Heroes" by David Bowie. This

version seems to be as faithful as the band can make it, and is somewhat moving, the saxophone playing the vocal part. You walk around the plaza, seeing all kinds of tourists.

BRIAN: So the sign didn't say this, but do you know the meaning of Hoheres Wesen?

JULIA: Do you?

BRIAN: It means "higher being" or "higher essence". I guess the founders wanted their city to be a new kind of thing. But I think the term comes from Hegel, or Kant, and I'm not sure all the connotations it has there.

JULIA: Any bad connotations?

BRIAN: Maybe. Only philosophically bad.

YOU: Maybe they just liked the basic idea and didn't worry about what Kant or Hegel said. Like they were starting fresh with what the word basically meant.

JULIA: There are so many times where I want to say something and people around me already know some other meaning to it and I can't say what I really mean.

YOU and BRIAN (simultaneously): Yes.

BRIAN: I'll say something like "That wasn't my favorite experience" and I mean exactly that. It wasn't bad. It just wasn't my favorite.

JULIA: And then people are so sure that you're saying "I hated it and I'm saying that in a colorful

way".

BRIAN: And then there are all the sexual innuendoes.

JULIA: People never get tired of those.

BRIAN: Sometimes when you're with the right people, you can forget about them. Like the people around you break your inner language, take your mind places you wouldn't ordinarily go.

JULIA: Yeah. And then other people make your mind be normal again.

YOU: It's the weird people who make things normal.

BRIAN: No, they're the normal people.

YOU: Yeah. Okay. I see that.

JULIA: Are you guys hungry?

BRIAN: Yeah.

YOU: Yeah.

JULIA: I see a restaurant over there.

BRIAN: Looks like all the other restaurants.

YOU: Let's go there.

You wait and get a seat and sit and talk. Julia tells stories from her pasts. Brian talks about his parents and siblings. You don't have as much to say today, but you listen.

Julia ordered some schnitzel. It's okay. Brian ordered Bratwurst mit Sauerkraut. He says it's okay. You ordered the Berliner Salad, a concession to California which is apparently in the style of hip modern-day German cuisine. You say it's okay. You pay for the meals because Julia drove and Brian pays you back for his part but runs out of cash.

YOU: Don't worry about it.

BRIAN: Okay.

Then you go back out into the sunshine and walk around aimlessly.

Why are you here? You're here to pass time, to bond, or not, to see whatever happens, and thus to be able to bond in a relaxed way. Or are you just passing time? You risk to just pass time -- maybe you only ever pass time. You walk around. Maybe in Brian's way of thinking, you're with God now, hearing him speak all your surroundings to you. Maybe in Julia's way of thinking, you're existing, taking your place in the universe. You don't feel bonded to your friends at all by this experience, but you wouldn't rather be anywhere else right now, except that Alte Stadt is hot today, and you would have been happier eating food from home, and Mitzi's is a nice place, or a hike, or anywhere but Alte Stadt would be better than Alte Stadt, but here you are with Brian and Julia, and what place could you prefer over reality? And you want to be with them

right now. Not with any feeling of yearning or warmth, but just as a fact.

A store catches Brian's attention and you three enter.

## CHECKPOINT CHARLIE'S

A not-too-large, somewhat cramped store which is Berlin-themed. Yes, there is a poster of the album *Heroes* on the wall. There are the T-shirts for sale. "Ich Bin Ein Berliner", "I ♥ Berlin", "Schland!!!!". One of them commemorates the fall of the Berlin Wall with the word "Freiheit". You can buy vials of the Berlin Wall with certificates of authenticity for \$50. You can buy a DVD of a Bertolt Brecht production. You wonder if anything has happened in Berlin since 1989, but can't think of anything specifically. A lot has happened in your life, and you can hardly name that anymore. Does the fall of the Berlin Wall mean as little to Germany as that epiphany you had 15 years ago that let you get over that one person? Maybe it means a little more to them. Modern people get good at getting over things.

You filter out of the shop and share your thoughts with Brian and Julia.

JULIA: Yeah, I know what you're talking about. You learn to get beyond things and then you can't hold on to anything.

BRIAN: I think about different ethnic groups that hold on to their enmities for generations. Maybe it's good to get over things.



YOU: But wouldn't it be better to not hold on to enmity but to still hold on to the past? If the past doesn't have significance, you learn to not find any significance in the present.

BRIAN: Because the present is just going to become the past?

YOU: And you're just going to forget it.

BRIAN: Interesting. So maybe you just remember the good times?

YOU: But that's a falsification of the past. So, having the real past, the good and bad, but without it making you an enemy of other people.

JULIA: Not everyone is ready to hear about the bad things they've done. Some people are, but not all people are.

BRIAN: Maybe it's better that we just live in a present that is constantly slipping away into unreality. At least, that seems realistic.

YOU: You're too young to be saying that.

BRIAN: Or maybe I'm just old enough.

YOU: Here we are in Alte Stadt, the idealistic birthplace of Hoheres Wesen, and we're talking about realism?

BRIAN: Well, look around you. This is the reality of Alte Stadt.

You can see a man in costume lecturing in a theatrical way (on some sort of 19th century topic, no doubt), to some

Japanese tourists, in Germanic-sounding English.

YOU: No, Brian, there has to be a deeper reality. You of all people. You believe in God.

BRIAN: I believe in the moment, too.

JULIA: I have to live in the moment. I can't handle memory. I used to have the muscles for it, but not any more.

YOU: There has to be some kind of deeper reality.

BRIAN: Maybe God will show it to us someday.

YOU: You say that without conviction.

BRIAN: Well, hope is the conjunction of desire and likelihood. I guess I just don't desire reality all that much. I do see how memory can bring reality to the present. But feel the breeze.

It is a nice breeze.

BRIAN: We're well-fed. Yes, we're eating the fat of the earth. But no one will fault us for it. We can walk around with guiltless consciences, like most everyone around us.

There is a non-operational cannon in the plaza, and a toddler boy plays on it next to his mother and father.

BRIAN: I agree with Malcolm X. We're living in heaven on earth. But he thought things could be different. They can't. It's our fate to have these lives of ease and beauty. And since we can't do anything about it, we might as well call it a good

thing and enjoy it.

YOU: You really believe that?

BRIAN: No. But I don't have any energy to fight it.

JULIA: What do you really believe in?

BRIAN: I'm with Beth. There has to be something more than this. There's nothing that can be said against all these people walking around, chilling out in the sun. Nothing to be said against heaven on earth. I can't really say anything against people for not caring about the millions of hungry people, or the people who work themselves to exhaustion to make products we buy for cheap. No, I have nothing to say against that. No words will come out of my mouth, that will produce no actions. But still, there has to be something more real than this.

JULIA: I think people can be called out on what they do.

BRIAN: Be my guest, come up with a new way to call them out.

JULIA: I agree with you two. I think if this is heaven on earth, this is fake heaven. And all of America is fake heaven, and the cathedrals of Europe are fake heaven. Even though they are beautiful. And the love of parents for children is fake love. There are moments when there is real love, here and there. But the love that people think is love is so often fake. Prosperity is fake, and wealth is fake. Everything people work for is fake. There are only a few moments of reality. And there are real people. I think that real people are those who really care about other people.

BRIAN: I would say it's also people who trust very well.

JULIA: I think you have to have both. If you can't trust, you can't genuinely care. And if you don't care, you're not trusting.

BRIAN: You're not trusting other people's realities.

JULIA: Yeah.

YOU: But look around at Alte Stadt. What is there to care about here? I mean, I could say the same most of the time in Mitzi's, or anywhere in Hoheres Wesen.

BRIAN: Sometimes you can't.

YOU: But aren't we as a society pushing and pushing toward scenes like this? Look at all these people walking around. Do you see any frowns? No one is murdering or stealing from anyone else. The government affords us all freedom of the press, assembly, and speech, and we walk around frankly, as citizens. The foreign tourists are happy in our home. There are no police officers in sight. Our society is succeeding here and now. Nothing to care about, except for the parents with their toddlers.

BRIAN: So people will cherish the years they have children so that they can really care?

YOU: Parents care about their children all their lives. It's the childless who are condemned to fake lives.

JULIA: I don't think even the care that parents

have for their children is real all the time. It's usually just an instinct which they don't deeply choose. It's good that they have that instinct for practical reasons, but it doesn't touch their deepest hearts.

YOU: Have you ever been a parent?

JULIA: A mother -- many times.

A man interrupts you all.

MAN: Sorry to interrupt you all.

He speaks with a deep voice, slowly, with what sounds to be an authentic German accent.

MAN: I myself am from Germany. I find this place atrocious as well. I don't want to get into all the reasons as I am sure you are all aware of them yourselves.

BRIAN: Is Germany any more real than Southern California?

MAN: In some superficial ways, yes. But your basic feeling is correct there as well as here. Everything is fake. I am fake, you are fake, we all are fake.

YOU: And the fact that we're all fake doesn't make it any better.

MAN: No, no, not at all. It actually makes it worse.

BRIAN: One thing that I am realizing is that all I can do is wait for God.

MAN: Yes, God can save us. We can't save ourselves.

BRIAN: Are you a believer?

MAN: Yes, I believe that God is real. Listen, I have to go now and find my wife. She goes off to stores and buys things without me. But you should go visit the Temple of Philosophy here. You shouldn't miss it. Farewell!

You return his farewell, and he walks off, looking around.

BRIAN: I didn't know there was a Temple of Philosophy here.

JULIA: Maybe there's a map somewhere.

YOU: I see one over there.

You walk over to the man-tall map. "YOU ARE HERE" says the map at a point on the plaza. You didn't realize there was so much to look at in Alte Stadt, so many different stores and a few historical buildings. You look around the map for a fraction of a minute and then find the Temple of Philosophy. It's a few blocks west of the plaza.

You three make your way through the moderate crowd and exit the plaza on the west side, and continue until you reach the Temple of Philosophy.

It's not a very large building, but it does have a pleasing shape, a square building with a pyramidal roof rising to a brass or

bronze dome. This is one of the original buildings, although the dome had to be replaced some years ago.

Inside is cool and quiet, the thick adobe walls keeping out the heat. No one else is inside except a docent. The building is dimly lit with electric lights made to look like candles.

You see a bust labeled Plato and a bust labeled Aristotle on opposite walls, staring into each other's eyes. There is a dais and old wooden chairs set out so that people could listen to a lecture. The walls with the busts each have bookshelves, with books. The docent explains that they're all in German and thus do not interest most tourists.

BRIAN: Are these original books?

DOCENT: No, these are reproductions. The original books are in a collection at the University of Hoheres Wesen.

BRIAN: May I look at one of them?

DOCENT: Certainly.

Brian looks around for a bit, but of course his German is not up to the task of whatever it is he's found. It's something by Hegel, you can make out on the spine. Julia looks over his shoulder.

JULIA: The word "Geist" ["Guysht"] is on there a few times.

BRIAN: Actually, you say that "Geist" ["Guyst"].

JULIA: Oh, so when do you say "Sht" and when do you say "St"?

BRIAN: I think it's when the "s t" pair comes before a vowel. In "Geist", it comes at the end of the word.

JULIA: Okay. I notice that a lot of the words are capitalized.

BRIAN: That's how they do things in German. Certain kinds of nouns are always capitalized.

JULIA: What does "Geist" mean?

BRIAN: It can mean different things. "Idea", "spirit", "ghost" are three big meanings.

JULIA: Huh. So it's like where philosophy and spirituality meet, in one word.

BRIAN: Yeah, I guess so.

He puts the book back on the shelf (first closing it).

YOU: You're basically an idealist, aren't you Brian?

BRIAN: You mean that I believe everything is mind or idea?

YOU: Yeah, isn't that what you've said before?

BRIAN: I don't know if that's quite right. Maybe it's right. I think there are some kinds of idealism I don't believe in. But I do think everything that



exists are minds and ideas, and they're of the same type of being so they can interact. Or maybe it's just minds, and the way a mind sees a mind is as ideas. But those minds aren't ideas, so I don't think it makes sense to call what I believe idealism. Because the minds are persons, the label could be personalism, and that's something that people have applied to things before. That's probably a better label than idealism, in my opinion.

YOU: I guess it makes sense. So when two minds meet, what happens?

BRIAN: The only minds that really meet are God's mind and each of his creature's minds. And when they do, they share the exact same experiences. Those are what they communicate to each other. A standing word.

YOU: Couldn't there be some other way things could be?

BRIAN: Maybe so, what do you have in mind?

YOU: Well, if the two minds are interacting, like God's mind and your mind, then you would see God as the scene you see in front of you and God would see something too, but we're not sure what he sees.

BRIAN: Do you think I see the same things you do when you see God?

YOU: Assuming your idea is correct, that we see other minds? No, I see something different.

BRIAN: Okay, hmm... So you see a different part of God, maybe?

YOU: Yeah, that would make sense.

BRIAN: What is a mind if not a bundle of experience?

YOU: It's a person, right?

BRIAN: Right, so there's some kind of unity to it that makes it a person.

All this going on inside the Temple of Philosophy. You have left Julia and the docent to their own concerns. At this moment, you are unaware of what they're doing.

YOU: Right, that makes sense.

BRIAN: So if we're made out of experience, how can we contact another set of experiences except by sharing experiences?

YOU: Maybe through a relationship. We never know anything about anybody else's experiences. But we can put out a signal which has effects inside other people's worlds that we are completely unaware of, and then they send out signals that affect us in ways that they are completely unaware of. But then we affect them in a way that causes them to affect us in a certain way that we know. It's like our actions on them produce an effect on us that we do know. And if we like that effect, we keep putting out the signal that causes us to receive that effect. And then they do the same thing, because the signals lead to each other. So we're connected in a relationship, but not any closer than that.

BRIAN: That's interesting. I still like it better to

think that we share our exact experiences with God.

YOU: Yeah, I just made up that idea right now, so maybe you can find a way to believe yours. Figure out how it's true. But you know it's true already, right? You just don't know how to explain it philosophically.

BRIAN: Do you know it's true?

YOU: No, but you do.

You become aware that Julia and the docent are talking. Soon after, a new group of tourists enters the Temple, and you three walk outside, returning to the heat and the sunlight.

JULIA: While you two were talking, I found out that they give philosophy lectures here at the Temple every Wednesday night. Brian, maybe you can meet some philosophers there to talk about your ideas.

BRIAN: Wow. I would go, except for the traffic.

JULIA: Yeah, maybe you can make a day of it. Isn't there something else downtown? You don't have a job, so you could find a place to hang out downtown and then go to the lecture. And Beth can bring her laptop with her and work downtown too.

BRIAN: I don't know... a lot of philosophy lectures aren't for me... a lot of philosophers aren't for me...

JULIA: Okay, maybe it'll work out and maybe it

won't.

BRIAN: Yeah, that's a good way to look at it.

YOU: Anything else to see while we're here?

BRIAN: All we did was go to a restaurant and a store and the Temple.

JULIA: Is there somewhere we can take a nap? I could use one before driving all the way back to where we live.

You go over to the map and try to guess if any of the buildings have places to sleep. The plaza is all paved, no grass or trees, no soft ground or shade.

BRIAN: No, it looks like we have to go back home as is.

YOU: Wait, I think there's a park somewhere downtown.

You get out your phone and check.

YOU: Yeah, it's not too far away.

So you go over to the park and find some shade under a tree. You don't feel sleepy, for some reason, so you stand watch as Julia and Brian lie down, trusting absolutely every person in the universe to not kill them for thirty minutes. You see them awake for a bit -- Brian probably never goes all the way under, but soon enough, Julia is breathing heavily and regularly. You look on her like she's your own child, and feel peace

inside yourself.

Some young adults are playing soccer over on the other end of the park, and crows are up to something.

Then the thirty minutes are up and Julia's phone goes off. She wakes up and Brian wakes up (or not) and they dust themselves off.

JULIA: Hm, got some grass stains on my pants.

YOU: Is that a problem?

JULIA: No, I have more pants. And, I bet the stains will come out. If not, I have pants for wearing when I take naps in the park. Okay, let's go back to the car.

You find your way back to the pay lot. No one has vandalized Julia's car. You get in and she drives. Soon enough it is you who are drowsing and sleeping while Julia plays her music and she and Brian talk over it. In this way, you skip experiencing some of Hoheres Wesen's famous traffic, and are unaware of the ideas, memories, and hopes which form the relationship which continues between Brian and Julia.

You faintly hear Julia say loud and clearly to Brian,

JULIA: Since I'm taking a different freeway home, I'll drop you off second.

BRIAN: Okay.

As you drowse and doze, you enter and leave a reverie. "Somewhere, somehow, there's a real life for me." echoes in your mind. You think of your parents and think of calling them on the phone. Why should you call them on the phone? Was it seeing Julia asleep as your child which makes you a child who needs to call your parents? Or is there something else? A little beth inside you who wants to speak to your mother and father? This beth knows more than you do sometimes. Reality. Being real. Thinking. Knowing. Relating. Caring. Trusting. Philosophy. You look out the window and see a car drive past you though it's in the lane to the right of you. The traffic flows the way it flows. You drowse. You doze. Julia gets off the freeway. Down the murder mile. Down the carnage boulevard. Past the terror train. Past anxiety and deadness and bluntedness. Past the dirt and the dust. Hellscape Wonderland smiling down from three story buildings. The bus. Things looking familiar. The grocery store. The liquor store. Mitzi's. The laundromat. Your apartment.

JULIA: Wake up, Beth, you're home.

YOU: I've been awake.

JULIA: Really wake up.

YOU: Thanks for the ride.

You gather your things and leave.

JULIA: We should hang out again sometime.

YOU: Sure thing. Maybe someday we'll run into each other purely by chance.

JULIA: No coincidences when the Universe is afoot.

BRIAN: Simone Weil preferred to call "Providence" "Chance".

JULIA: God-believers have so much baggage they have to say stuff like that. But the Universe has a clean record.

BRIAN: Does it?

...he says as you open your apartment door, having walked away from the curb.

BRIAN and JULIA (more or less simultaneously, distantly): Goodbye.

You wave and enter your apartment, shut the door and lock it, and feel simultaneously worn out and refreshed.

[closing theme]

WAITING FOR MARGOT  
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## COMMENTS

(no comments)

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