

District Court

Ursula Krechel

(Translated by Robert A. Cantrick)

Above the Lake

He had arrived. Arrived, but where? The railroad station was a terminus, the platforms nothing special, a dozen tracks, but then he entered the main hall. It was a magnificent artifact, a cathedral of a railroad station, a coffered barrel vault arching over it, a bright, blue flood of light streamed through the windows, a light as if newborn after the long journey. The high walls were clad in dark marble—“Reich-Chancellery dark” is what he would have called this shade ironically, to himself, before he emigrated, now he just found it stately and elegant, yes, even intimidating. But the marble had been mounted on the walls not just as a covering, it had recessed panels, stepped edges and divided the walls rhythmically. The floor was polished; behind the counters correctly uniformed men peered out through small, round windows, before which people stood in line—people who were not at all badly dressed. (For people who had lost a war, a defeated people, he thought, they held their heads surprisingly high). He also saw French security guards in the alcoves of the hall, courteously keeping watch over the comings and goings in the station. They wore olive-green uniforms and carried weapons. Taking in the elegant hall at a glance, he could not imagine they would have any cause for intervention—and there was none—just a quiet, admonishing presence, enforcing certainty.

He felt the calming civility, the timelessness of this railroad-station concourse. He looked toward the tall, swinging doors, no doubt three meters high and completely covered in sheet brass “Push” pressed into the brass in rounded letters at about chest level. Cathedral doors, doors that took away any airs a traveler might have: It’s the railroad system that’s important and significant; the individual traveler needn’t worry, he’ll get to his

destination safely and on time all right. Kornitzer's destination had been uncertain for so long—he had never had so much as a vague thought about a dream destination, and that made the contrast inordinately painful. His transitory existence had been his certainty. Everything was exalted and tastefully uplifting in this concourse. He looked around but didn't see his wife; he had given her his time of arrival. (Or was he failing to recognize her after ten years?) No, Claire wasn't there. But he was surprised to see throngs of day tourists returning from the nearby winter-sports area with skis on their shoulders, happy and exhilarated, faces tanned.

He pushed open one of the tall doors and was dazzled. There was the lake, the great, blue mirror. It was only a few steps to the quay, water lapped gently, no ripples disturbed the surface. True, his arrival had been delayed by more than two hours, but the delay had been wrenching; the joy of arriving and seeing his wife again had been relegated to an indefinite future. There was the lighthouse, jutting from the water; there was the Bavarian lion, keeping watch over the harbor with an air of casual authority; and there were the mountains, so distant yet so close, a backdrop of white and grey and alpine rose, their talus slopes, their immutable ancient power, indescribably beautiful. He heard someone call his name.

The meeting of a man and a woman who have not seen each other for so long, who must have believed they had lost each other. The breathless freeze, the speechlessness, the eyes that search for the eyes of the other, the locking of eyes, the eyes widen, drink, lower, then turn away, relieved, as if fatigued by the labor of recognition, yes, it's you, it's still you. A whole face buries itself in a coat collar but then quickly turns upward again, trembling with excitement, the inability to bear the other's eyes, eyes missed for ten years. The clear, watery eyes of the man behind the wire-frame glasses and the woman's green eyes—the pupils have a dark ring. It's the eyes that set the stage for the reunion, but the people who must endure it, must bear it, have changed, they are older now, about the same height, the same eye level. They smile, they smile at each other, the skin at the corners of their eyes crinkles, no blinking, nothing; nothing, just the look, the lingering

gaze, pupils transfixed. Then a hand frees itself—the man’s or the woman’s? In any case, it’s a brave hand, or rather it’s just the tip of the right middle finger that shows courage, and instinct, too, and caresses the high cheekbone of the marital partner who was believed lost. A familiar finger, it stimulates nerves but carefully avoids arousing emotion. It’s more that the sensitive skin over the cheekbone reacts, sends an alarm to the whole body. A reunion of nerve cells, not of the married couple. That takes much, much longer. It’s a sensation that sends a shiver throughout the whole nervous system, “It’s you, yes, it’s really you.” That instinctive rediscovery of the loved one, of the familiar skin, was a miracle upon which the Kornitzers often remarked later—later on, with each other, they couldn’t tell their children about it. It was not the touched body part (of the man or the woman) that sent the alarm throughout the body but the person actively doing the touching, and half a second later it was impossible to say who had touched and who had been touched. The hand, still alone, which had been without its marital partner for nearly ten years, moved, twitched, stroked, yes, embraced and never wanted to let go again.

That was the arrival. The signal from the nerve cells prepared a way for the whole person. A way from the railroad station in the town on Lake Constance to the inn at the harbor, which Kornitzer hardly saw as he sat across from his wife, having a bowl of soup, his luggage strewn and stacked about. He now saw his wife more in outline, she had become bony, her shoulders were hunched against the cold, he saw her large mouth as she opened it for spoonful of soup, he saw her teeth, the gold speck patching an eyetooth she had once fallen on, he saw her hands, grown rougher and coarser since their farewell in Berlin. His own hands he hid in his lap. He had downed his soup quickly and matter-of-factly. He looked at his wife, trying, layer by layer, to reconcile the image before him, the image of the woman sitting across from him, with the image he had formed during the many intervening years. He couldn’t. Even the photo in his wallet, which he had stared at it until he thought he had it memorized—if that’s even possible with a photo—was of no help. Claire was now someone spooning soup and obviously had no qualms about sitting

opposite a near stranger. For a moment he wondered, What had she learned to fear that makes her unafraid now? He refrained from asking, Claire, how did things go with you? That question presupposed greater familiarity, it was a question needing a long reply, a novel, and above all time for listening, a calm, relaxed, “Tell me.” Nor did she ask, Richard, how did things go with you? He would have had to shrug his shoulders, time-lapse tempo, fast forward, a slow replay, and where would he begin? Finally his wife had scraped up the last of her soup and set the spoon down on the china with a clatter (was she trembling?) and asked, How many days have you been traveling? He could give a short answer to that: Fourteen on the boat and three days from Hamburg to Lake Constance. That didn’t seem unduly long to her; it didn’t seem to make her feel sorry for him. She took him with her to her village. Actually, he had not expected that. The relief organization that had paid for his travel, that had transported him to Lake Constance, had given him an instruction sheet telling him to report to their office as soon as he got to his new place of residence. Kornitzer told that to Claire, but she wouldn’t hear of it. The relief organization isn’t going anywhere, you can go there tomorrow. Kornitzer’s luggage was to follow in a cart; Claire had made a deal with a man at the railroad station who worked on a farm. He was to come for them at the inn in about an hour, and he did. Kornitzer and his wife helped him load the bags. Bending and straightening, lifting and shoving: that was the first activity they carried out together that had the purpose of creating some privacy. A curtain. It closed behind the pair as they retired to Claire’s small, flowered room in house number six in a hamlet with the name of Bettwang, where the only items of value she had been able to save were a record player and a typewriter. He thought he recognized the typewriter from Berlin, it was called Erica, and its type basket had survived the whole war and the evacuation unscathed. A tip of the hat to Erica, and one of Claire’s first, triumphant remarks to her returning husband was, I’ve saved up lots of ribbons. Ribbons supposedly were not important for the war effort, or else they forgot to declare that they were. And they take up very little space in a refugee’s luggage. So we can write applications and letters in properly. He didn’t know what to say to that; he just nodded, he could see she had acted providently. He too had wondered

what to bring on the long trip. Coffee? Tobacco? Candy? Tropical fruit? Documentation of his occupation? But the rules changed almost daily; what was permitted one day was suddenly prohibited the next for political or hygienic reasons (or for practical reasons that concealed ideological or completely unfathomable reasons—customs records, perhaps). Nobody knew. What was wrong with a small bag of sugar? What was wrong with the quantity of perfume or tobacco permitted a month ago? It made you look like an idiot, and maybe that was precisely the point of the constantly conflicting rules.

This is the wash stand, Claire said, I don't have running water. The armoire he could see for himself, the bed, too—narrow, it looked almost virginal—the rickety chairs. He saw a kind of shame in Claire's face, a hurt expression. And he saw her hand gesture, a bit nonchalant, and in it he recognized her former self-assurance: Sorry, that's just how it is, this is what it's come to. He saw the light from the small lamp on the night table and the ridiculously thin strip of ribbon for turning it on and off. And the couple, who now had to relearn to be a couple, switched it off. Then it was dark, and the darkness was a touching, a school for the blind of feeling, a primary school, yes, really just a touching and breathing.

So on this first day they got no further than the first emotion, "Is it you? Is it really you?" and the confirmation, "Yes, it's you." Maybe even that was asking a bit too much. There was no way to foresee how and when the family would ever be together again. They were still two forcibly separated people who knew almost nothing about their own children.

Next day he got on his way into the town along the winding road, past meadows and isolated farmsteads, the mountain range always in view, the folds of the massif with bands of clouds lashed to their peaks. After he had walked a good half hour, cumulus clouds arose. Snow-white drifts plowed into each other, a three-dimensional, haptic, cloud free-for-all with no certain outcome. Wagons passed him, the post-office bus, too, but he wanted to walk, to keep walking, and, finally, at a bend in the road, the lake appeared before him. The greyness of the air spread over the surface of the water like a

delicate veil. He walked six kilometers downhill, his knees were giving out, a completely unaccustomed physical sensation, but he liked it; it was as if he were a young, itinerant journeyman. Yet he was a man in his midforties who had already been through much. Too much.

The city center—he had not paid much attention to it on his arrival—was an island connected to the mainland, the farmland, by a long bridge. On the shore were villas and parks, a lovely area. He also saw immediately that many of the villas had been requisitioned by French officers and their staffs; sentries were posted in front. Beyond the bridge were wood-shingled houses with overhanging upper stories and overhanging roofs with dormer windows. The town of Lindau behaved as though it were a thing outside of time and space. He liked that thought but couldn't develop it and draw any conclusion from it. Something both lulled him and at the same time excited him (yes, what was it?). He studied the bay windows, the stone balconies, the gabled tranquility, the steep stairways leading up to wine taverns, where, he assumed, nothing had changed in sixty years—sedate, old-German *gemütlichkeit*, atmosphere—only the waitresses had gotten younger, chatting on the street outside the taverns, arms folded, Kornitzer eyed them admiringly. And he saw something else that didn't make sense. He had read about the destruction of German cities, about wastelands of rubble, firestorms. In this city he saw not a single house destroyed, not so much as a tile seemed to have fallen from any roof. He would have to ask Claire about it when he got back to Bettwang.

He found his way to the UNRRA easily, the United Nations relief agency responsible for his case. The office was on the second floor of a broad building with an oriel window, located on the side of the island facing the mainland, in *Zwanzigerstraße*. In the hallway, several young men sat on chairs—sprawled, actually, Kornitzer thought—talking among themselves in a soft, melodious language. They looked up momentarily when he sat down beside them, as if to say, What's he doing here? They seemed to be Poles or Ukrainians, forced laborers or persons liberated from concentration camps and work camps, stranded here in this beautiful town and needing or wanting to be transported

somewhere, to left-over people who expected them, as Claire had expected him, or to completely unimaginable new lives, which they had chosen for want of the previous one, which had been destroyed, as he had wanted to be brought here for want of his former life in Berlin, of which only rubble remained (that's how Claire had told it to him). The door opened, and a young woman with a heavy accent, which he could not place, whispered somewhat defensively, Next, please. Two of the men got up. Only one, said the woman, holding up her right thumb for greater clarity. Friend can bad German, said one of the dispersed men and shouldered his way into the room with his friend. The woman left the door open, it appeared she did not want to be alone in a closed room with two needy foreigners. It was quite a while before the two left the room clutching a form. The door remained open for the next two applicants, too. Then there was a long pause during which the door remained closed. That left Kornitzer alone with a young man who was missing an upper incisor and who kept poking his tongue into the gap with quick nervous movements. He said—or sizzled, through the gap in his teeth—he had simply been taken away, snatched away from his parents, his village had been surrounded, the churchgoers had been arrested, everyone who was young, he motioned emphatically over his shoulder, a dismissive gesture, everyone gone, to Germany. It had been very hard for his parents. With no son, with no help on the farm. Then he sank into a brooding silence into which Kornitzer did not want to intrude with inappropriate questions.

When Kornitzer's turn finally came, the woman closed the door behind him; it was like a sign of trust. Kornitzer said what he was required to say, a litany, accompanied by the rustling of the documents he had brought. He told her that he had arrived the day before as a displaced person, that he expected assistance with his return. His fear, that she would reprimand him for not reporting to the relief agency office *immediately* proved unfounded. He had also feared that as a displaced person he would be assigned to mass housing. There was no provision on the questionnaires for being taken back by an "Aryan" wife. Presumably such cases were a rarity. The woman filled out a form with three carbon copies and sent him to an adjacent room, where he received food ration

cards in exchange for one of the copies. He was instructed to take the remaining sheets back to the first office, have a seat in the hallway, and wait for his exit interview. So he found himself out in the hallway again, this time with two young women, who were still almost girls, and who winked at him in an oddly comical way, as though the only way they could make contact was through innocent or supposedly innocent but in reality furtive eye games. It was a winking that was more like exposing oneself, and he had to lower his eyes, which only seemed to offend the young women. Back in the first room, the UNRAA clerk sought to dismiss him politely and to save herself time, but he stayed, rooted to the spot. I'm a lawyer, I'm a judge, I'd like to find work in my profession as soon as possible. You're a DP, said the woman, you've lost your German citizenship. I'm responsible for you as a DP, not as a job seeker. Go to the District Office, they have an employment office. There's a really good man there. He was laid off in '33 and rehired in '45 as though nothing had happened. Talk to him. They need glazers, masons, and agricultural workers, I don't know anything about judges. Then she dismissed him with a short nod that was meant to be friendly but made clear she was busy.

Kornitzer wanted to discuss this outcome with his wife first, the way he had formerly discussed so many things with her: business matters, plans for the future, fantasies that were not too far-fetched. So he set out for Bettwang, up the winding road. The way back took longer than the way down; indeed, the road was very steep. A world of snowdrifts and blossoming apple trees spread out between the lakeshore and the steeply rising slopes of the Allgäu Alps. Everything slowed down and became cooler. And, as he climbed, he kept looking back—at the lake, at the high mountains, at the sublime landscape of peaks and at the ruches of snow in the ditch beside the road. Time had become a time for experiencing. Walking buffered his experience as an applicant, separating it from his experience as a husband unsure of himself, and the time he spent in Claire's room, waiting for her return from the dairy, where she had found work, was a timeless time. Then Claire arrived with the post-office bus, her cheeks were pink, but she was also tired after a day's work at the office, work she scarcely knew, because in Berlin (back then,

before they'd had to separate) of course she'd had her own secretary. And what he had to tell her about his first encounter with the relief organization on German soil was told quickly, melting like snow in the spring sun. Get some rest after that long trip, Claire said, go to the employment office in a few days.

Much had been cut off, fallen away, fortunately, however, not his powers of perception, not his ability to feel joy, an extraordinary joy. And the fact that he could feel it, yes, that even his delayed arrival had been joyful, he owed to his wife and to her alone. He had hesitated, after ten years of separation, to continue calling her "his wife." But she had overwhelmed him with her definiteness: she wanted him back as "her husband," she had put it in writing, and he had read it. And to get him back she had taken very sensible steps.

He looked out the window, saw the onion steeple of the church, behind it a great sun was setting, a blazing fruit, a tropical fruit, the mountains glowed, and something glowed within him. Yes, to be here, to be with Claire, was good. He glowed, it made him determined to find the work that he was made for. An occupation that would fulfill and nourish him and Claire, and the children, too. The hamlet of Bettwang with its six or seven farms had no tavern, evenings the inhabitants sat on benches in front of their houses, occasionally joined by a neighbor. They drank must and stared into the blue, which for Kornitzer was a foreign blue. But Kornitzer did not want to join them. The hamlet had a one-room school house, a cobbler, an alpine dairy, and a small store (*Geschäfte*, people called it, "the little store"), where everyday essentials were available, zwieback just in case, a barrel of sauerkraut, matches and rubber bands, sewing needles and safety pins, and twine. Most groceries, milk products, and fruit came from the farms and gardens, there was no call for them in the store.

Kornitzer liked to slip into the small church with gilded altars to the left and right and a pulpit stuck high up on the wall like a swallow's nest, gilded saints on each side of the main altar, dreamy under their bishop's hats. On the right-hand side-altar a Sebastian,

arrows stuck into his beautifully carved and painted flesh in a regular pattern, smiled down sweetly and mildly upon the prayerful. Everything worked together in a comforting way, tested through the centuries and never changed—the self-assurance of a peasant culture that asks no questions and does not want to be questioned. Claire noted her husband’s short church visits ironically, she was a Protestant through and through. Everything overwrought, dipped in gold, the festoon molding, was foreign to her, the ecstatic faces of the saints repelled her. But if Kornitzer sat in the little church with the gilded saints for a short rest, he must like it, or maybe he even preferred being with the Catholics. (Claire went to the Protestant church in town now and again but didn’t make much of it.)

The little village church and its aura dominated hamlet, from its doorstep there was a wonderful view. A wreath of graves crowded around the church, reclined against the cemetery wall. The gravestones stared into the mountain landscape with large eyes defying death, warming their backs by the churchyard wall for a generation or more, until the next to die needed space. Kornitzer saw the incredibly broad folds of the mountains, the iciness, the cold, the graniteness; it didn’t surprise him that earlier travelers had considered the Alps hostile, ugly, in fact, and had closed the curtains of their coaches when the massif came into view. And then his eyes drifted back to the village. The church, the cemetery, the rectory with its faded red shutters, the fire station, a handful of sprawling farmsteads, sheds in front, cow stalls behind them that were attached to the main houses at right angles. Sometimes there was enough space left over near the road for a gusset of flowers. Between the thighs formed by farmhouse and stall the warm dung heap was enthroned. It was the center of the farmyard, the chickens scatted about on it, pecking for worms and maggots, craning their necks imperiously, and the rooster watched over them. Kornitzer had never spent much time in the country, maybe on hikes or while passing through the countryside to some other destination. Bettang, with its enchantingly beautiful setting above the lake, impressed him. The cobbler hammered away at his iron, the cows mooed, the chickens cackled, the post-office bus arrived twice

a day, and other than that it was so quiet that, for the first time since his arrival at Lake Constance, he felt his own uneasiness acutely.

Claire explained to him that the village was empty now and at peace with itself. At about the time she arrived in the village—January 1944—a group of school children from the Ruhr had also arrived. The village was paralyzed with panic at the masses needing accommodation. And the teacher, a wisp of a man, a man on the verge of retirement, brought the children—who had been registered on lists and numbered and wore their numbers around their necks—from the railroad station up the hill to the village. Whether the town on the lake was also required to accept that many children Claire did not know, probably not. The children were probably better off in the villages, no one knew what the fates of the cities would be, that was the opinion, and it was not wrong. The teacher lined up the students from the Ruhr at the post-office bus stop, one beside the other in rows, she said, they'd forgotten what cities they'd come from, children with backpacks and small suitcases and excited faces. The farm women came out of their houses and chose one or two each. Her farm woman, Claire said, Mrs. Pfempfle, took in girls. In addition to her big boys she wanted to have girls on the farm, little city girls, who stared at the cows in wonderment, as if they were fairy-tale animals, and drank the warm milk right there in the stall and then shook themselves. The farm also had a Polish farmhand, she said. You mean a forced laborer, he said, interrupting her, thinking of the young man with the missing tooth whom he'd met in the relief office. Claire brushed aside his objection: No one ever said "forced laborer." The farms could not even have existed without help. Their hand ate with the family at their dinner table—until the local farm official came for an inspection and told the farm woman that they couldn't do that, the Pole would have to eat in the stall. Next day the farm woman ushered him back to his place at the table. Then, when the war ended, there were French in the village, too, fifty men for sure, and billeting them made the houses seem as full as bandboxes. Claire liked talking, and he liked listening to her. It had been like that before, too. And then he decided to ask the question that had been on his mind since his solitary walk into town: Why was the town

not destroyed? The town was designated an International Red Cross town with behind-the-scenes help from Swiss diplomats, Claire said. That's also why no bridges were blown up. On April 22, 1945, the city of Lindau had been placed on alert. Day after day, more refugees came into town. The few trains that were still running were overflowing. An SS staff squatted in the old city hall, it seemed like a safe place, and a military staff moved in with the local leadership of NSDAP. Conflicting rumors swirled around town. But Claire Kornitzer also remembered exactly what happened on April 30, 1945. It was a clear, bright spring day, the day Hitler killed himself. That morning at eight o'clock the enemy-alarm sounded in the city. It was said that the owner of an inn called the Idyll encountered the advancing French and asked the officer in the first tank to protect his hometown. It was also said that he took over leading the tank and two armored personnel carriers coming from Wasserburg. So shortly after nine the first French tanks rolled across the Lake Bridge. A white flag flew from the steeple of the Catholic church. The French quickly disarmed the Combat Troop Command and the police. Then, she said, more and more troops, which only the day before had been considered the enemy, flooded into the city, while the tanks stayed in Aeschach or left in the direction of Bregenz. People streamed together everywhere, no one knew what was going to happen. And among the onlookers on the bridge there was not enough trust to make it worthwhile arguing about seriously. You had to wait and see what was going to happen.

The conditions of surrender were soon announced: curfew from 20:00 hours till 06:30 hours. A loudspeaker truck went through the town and surrounding villages ordering the surrender of all weapons, ammunition, transmitters, binoculars. The few military personnel who had remained in the town were to turn themselves in as prisoners. Then the town was occupied without the slightest incident. On the Giebelwiesen, the Bahndamm, and other squares in and around the town the French had set up artillery, and they soon commenced firing. SS troops had withdrawn to Bregenz and put up resistance. So the next day, Bregenz came under fire. The noise was hellish, the like of which the neighbor city had never known. The ground shook, the sky was black with smoke, a

mushroom cloud rose up, there were fires all over town. It was the final defeat of facts. There was nothing more to say, no one in the town or the hills beyond wanted to imagine anything more. She said that many stood on the Lake Bridge, silently watching the spectacle of the burning neighbor town with horror and secretly relieved that their own roofs, gables, window panes had not been hit—nor their own heads, which could not stop marveling. For three hours Allied air squadrons attacked while shells from the heavy artillery flew over steadily. Then, on Tuesday, May 1, Bregenz fell, the great stream of combat troops moved on, the electrical power went out, there was no more newspaper. A ghostly silence prevailed, spanned by radiant spring light. God slept, God rested after allowing so much chaos. Chaos—Claire said and furrowed her brow—is more a matter of the beginning, before creation of the world, and now any kind of order or system, since the beginning of human history, seemed unthinkable. She of all people, a native of Berlin, a Prussian, a Protestant, needed simple order, and being without it, she said, was an additional punishment, which, she believed, she did not deserve. Kornitzer had to smile at this mild outburst from his wife. Approximately 150 National Socialists were arrested, she continued, including the local group leaders from three towns. The NSDAP district leader chose to leave town with a few members of his staff. But he was shot by a Pole a few days later; that's how it was reported, and that's what Claire told her husband.

The proprietor of the Idyll Inn, who had bragged that he had welcomed the French, was later accused of lying and left town. Claire Kornitzer could no longer remember his name, and it didn't matter. Now they say he encountered the first French tank, and the officer had asked him to show him the way to the town, nothing more. And the discovery of his shamefully unspectacular act of heroism was so sobering that people would have completely forgotten the man had he not been mentioned in the official gazette. But Claire had thrown that issue of the paper away; others she had kept, she couldn't say why. Forget that man, forget the Idyll, she didn't know whether that inn with the false-sounding name still existed or not. And it didn't interest her, either, not in the least, she said to her husband, who was developing a patient attentiveness to local history.

“Forced laborers, forced laborers” echoed through his head at night before he fell asleep. I forced my wife to acknowledge the concept of forced laborer when, presumably like all Germans, she was talking about the Polish farmhand. But he, Kornitzer, was German too! He had been denaturalized, so, half asleep, he had to limit himself to so banal a concept as “all Germans in the country.” Or should he go so far as to think “all Germans who were infected with National Socialism”? That would include his own wife, whom he wanted to except, whom he had to except. The question annoyed him, he had good reason to see himself as a conqueror, but that didn’t make him happy, so, half asleep, he grasped his wife’s arm, the one closest to him, and kneaded it, though he had intended only to caress it, but his inner stress over having been unjust to Claire probably made him squeeze it harder, and Claire made a sound that she probably could not have managed awake—a deep, snorting sigh, like a horse, and then the arm, which he still held, made him realize that Claire had been asleep for some time. And Kornitzer, still long unable to get to sleep, said to himself, I’ve been unfair to her. That sounded good, even liberating, but then, on the other hand, it was not a legal concept. He tried a little longer to think of a concept that really fit. It was like an inner constitutional complaint against himself. He couldn’t find one that was suitable. Ok, “coercion into a settlement” would be closest. But coercion could also be interpreted as approbatory, as an invitation to a join legal community, which he and his wife already were anyway. Half asleep as he was, he knew he had not made himself liable to prosecution by his wife. But there was a shade of meaning there that could not be viewed as either moral or ethical yet was on a plane for which he wished he could find a place in his discipline.

When he had tossed and turned for what must have been an hour, he took his wife’s arm trustingly for a second time, the one closest, embracing it like a security blanket, something he could hold onto unconditionally, and he did, and in the morning his wife seemed to have not the slightest inkling of all his expenditure of thought and feeling—which was a relief but also a little odd.

How had Claire Kornitzer found her husband? That was a long story. She had come across an appeal in the official gazette, and it electrified her.

Germans of the Jewish faith,

Preparatory to compensation for moral and material injustices done to German citizens of the Jewish faith or descent, a survey is being conducted of all who were affected. All German citizens of the Jewish faith or descent residing in the District of Lindau (B) are hereby asked to submit a written report to the mayor of their town no later than January 20, 1946, in the following format:

Last and first names

Are you pure Jewish (within the meaning of the Nuremberg Laws or of mixed ancestry of the first or second degree)?

Date and place of birth

Last place of residence

Marital status

Former occupation

Current occupation

Physical injuries

Financial losses

The mayors shall present the collected reports to the Provincial Court no later than February 1, 1946.

(signed) Dr. Eberth, Provincial Counsel

The announcement did not apply to Claire Kornitzer, but it was a toehold, a lifeline, the certainty that she would be heard and that she would get a hearing for her husband, to whom the announcement did apply. But she had no idea how her husband could find her nor she him. Nor had she any idea how many people in the district would respond to this call. The deadline for filing had been made very tight, she would have to sit herself down and get to work to pull the documents together and carefully draw up a list of them. Was the deadline so close because suddenly—more than six months after the end of the war—

it had become embarrassing that no one had asked about Jews (as though the “Jewish problem” had been taken care of in Auschwitz, in Majdanek)? Or was it so close so that only a few of the returnees or others crawling out of hiding places could apply? Claire wondered about it but could come to no conclusion.

That only 681 Jews in the French zone had survived she could not know, and if she had known it, she would not have been amazed, just deeply saddened.

Right next to the appeal she saw an ad: *Seeking large backpack with leather straps to exchange for one cubic meter of dry pine or beech wood.* Yes, firewood was sought after, but means of transportation were also in demand. A backpack cannot transport sufficient firewood. Perhaps some city dwellers had backpacks they had used for weekend hikes in the mountains, and maybe garden owners chopped down their trees, pines, beeches without giving it a thought. The Pfempfls, the farmers she was living with, wouldn't think of cutting down their fruit trees; those trees were the foundation of their farm, they were something that had always belonged to the family, like the dairy cattle. On the facing page she saw the ad: *Notice to my students. Zither lessons will resume Tuesday, January 22, 1946. The classroom is in Hauptstrasse 27, fourth floor, in the office of Mr. Merkl, Customs Secretary. New registrants may apply there, too.* She also read, *Urgently seeking bass player (slap bass) as well as cellist and trombonist; also needed was an Experienced female pop singer (backup).* Applications were to be directed without delay to the concert and dance orchestra *Otti Weber-Helmschmied.*

She read all of this very carefully and tried to empathize with people who placed such ads. And she tried to imagine other people in her not-freely-chosen area trying to empathize with her situation, Claire Kornitzer's, situation: the children far away in order to survive; her husband even farther away so that he could survive. And the onset of war, the senseless instigation of war, which became a world-wide catastrophe, prevented her own emigration, prevented the reunion of a father with his children, kept her from joining her husband on another continent. All of that left scars, trauma, losses that could scarcely

be made comprehensible to a stranger. Backpacks, firewood, and a zither rose out of the mist; trombonists and bassists joined them then sank back into the mist. So she had to write in the blanks on the form carefully and without too much emotional ballast, not too much, in no event too much, yet forcefully and not hesitantly. And this is what she wrote.

Re: Registration of German citizens of Jewish faith or descent.

In response to the appeal in the Gazette (No. 4, 1/15/1946), I submit the following information:

Last name: Kornitzer

First name: Claire Marie, née Pahl

I myself am full-Aryan; however, I have been married to a man who is fully Jewish (within the meaning of the Nuremberg Laws) since 1930. We have not divorced.

The word *not* she underlined twice: not, and not divorced, too. That makes it stand out from the page prominently. And she carefully fills out the rest of the questionnaire like this:

Husband: Dr. Richard Karl Kornitzer (formerly judicial member of the Patent and Copyright Department of District Court I in Berlin)

Terminated 4/1/1933 without notice and without salary or pension because of his race.

Emigrated to Cuba February 1939 and since February 1942 I have received no information at all about my husband.

Children: Georg, born 1/22/1932

Selma, born 3/30/1935

I took the two children to England at the beginning of January 1939 to be cared for. Regarding the whereabouts of my children, too, I have only contradictory information.

The whole complex of compensation for lost property, her health, none of that interests her so much now; she mentions it only in passing, perhaps she hopes to get assistance

from her jurist husband. Now she has other interests, existential interests, and she describes them to the district office.

Regarding compensation: First of all, I respectfully request your assistance, insofar as possible, in the following two points.

- 1) support in determining the current whereabouts of my husband and in securing his return,
- 2) your kind support in my efforts to obtain an entry visa for a short visit to my children in England. The purpose of this short visit to England, in addition to seeing my children, from whom I have been separated for seven years, will also be to facilitate reuniting the family.

She very deliberately omits a salutation, she has suffered and sacrificed enough. She signs her name in large, sweeping letters: Claire Kornitzer. The final *e* of her first name trembles, gets a little skewed. Who cares what graphologists might say about that (are there any left?), perhaps excitement at the prospect of a good outcome, perhaps also a visual concomitant of the kidney stones that have tormented her for some time, as though this, too, was the excretion of something sharp, quite inappropriately sharp: a hope, self-confidence, the energy to take the reins from here, from this remote corner, Lake Constance, and steer the family coach—thrown off the road by known causes—back on course. Claire Kornitzer bent to the task with a will. And after her application was submitted, the relief organizations went into action. Lists were compared, the gears of social machinery churned at top speed, running red hot, countless names of missing persons from all newspapers and every public appeal were cabled across continents, lists of searchers and the sought were compared until, at one point, they matched.

Kornitzer had found his wife, and into the bargain had received the gift of a panorama the like of which he had never seen before. The green meadows with the dairy cows chewing their cud in the foreground, then a grove, the broad fruit orchards—fruit plantations, you had to say, if you'd been to the tropics—apples and pears in such abundance as he had never seen before. Then, above them, the mountain vista, peak after peak along a broad

front. The first were cold and white, chalky; those behind more blue, the farthest shaded into violet, ripping the blue heavens bloody. He learned their names like a schoolboy. He was surrounded by a landscape such as he could not have dreamed of, so much fresh air it almost intoxicated him. The sky at sunrise, when he looked out the window, had a fine down. The sky at sunset had a long chain of waxen clouds that looked modeled, coifed; cloud sculptures in a great, popular exhibit, like a glass palace. Glorious days followed by sheets of rain, when the mountain range disappeared into the mouse grey. Next day: a featherbed in the sky; the air: biting, paschal, traces of snow remained in the dells, drizzling, blurring, melting. Yes, here you had to be a farmer, couldn't be anything but a farmer, with a red-cheeked wife, wearing a headscarf in the stall, and a flock of children, rosy-cheeked and healthy, with skin like milk and blood, and honey flowed, dribbled over the thickly buttered bread, in the kitchen a cross hung in the corner over the dinner table, where everyone gathered, and the children got the pompoms at the throats of their knitted jackets in the honey, and the farmer's wife looked on indulgently, she had enough to do in the stall, in the house, the children thrived, ate the apples, the apples red-cheeked and shiny and the children, too. (Maybe he was mistaken; maybe he was idealizing something he knew nothing about. The narrowmindedness, the strictness, the prohibition against stepping out of line—even when the community's thinking and actions were governed by feelings—the prohibition against kicking over the traces, going one's own way, all were things he didn't know.) A cow was calving in the stall, the dramatic convulsions of the animal's abdomen had to be monitored, and the children were still eating breakfast.

Yes, Richard Kornitzer liked the hamlet of Bettwang. Or did he like it so much because here he had found Claire again? Because in this farmhouse, one shoulder pointing to the road, a kind of certainty prevailed that he had lacked for so long? Downstairs, the Pfempfle, the owners of the farm, a man and woman of his age and Claire's, faced the times placidly—where these fruit farmers had been during the war and how they had made it through Kornitzer did not really dare to ask, after all, he was a guest. On the second floor there were displaced persons from the Egerland, sisters or sisters-in-law,

with three children and a husband, who with great industry had built up a shoe-polish business. Shoe polish was not an essential item, it was more a luxury product, but an affordable one. So boxes with cans of shoe polish were stacked in the stairwell; where the man had gotten the inventory was a mystery. The husband of the other displaced person was missing; she knew nothing of him or his possible death.

The Pfemples milked and fed the cows, they sprayed the fruit orchards seven times a year, as the district fruit-tree inspector recommended. As Kornitzer understood it: the winter spraying by mid-March; the early pre-blossom spraying soon after budding; the second pre-blossom spraying just before the blossoms appeared; the first post-blossom spraying as soon as the petals fell off; the second post-blossom spraying approximately two weeks after the first, the third post-blossom spraying two to three weeks after the second—earlier in rainy weather, later in dry weather—and the late scab spraying between the beginning of August and the beginning of September. The biggest enemy of fruit was the apple-blossom weevil, but aphids, scab, winter moths, and codling moths could also endanger the harvest. The winter spraying controlled the eggs of various pests. The Pfemples kept careful records of the preventive sprayings; nothing could be left to chance. When diseases appeared on the leaves or fruit, they usually could no longer be controlled. Copper sulfate and lime sulfur sprays on diseased portions often even caused burns. It was also important to spray early in the morning or late in the evening and never to spray open blossoms, because the bees that pollinated them had to be protected. And only when there was no wind, if possible.

The Pfemples were as liberal in granting their sons freedoms as they were scrupulous in tending their apple trees, as long as the work got done on the farm. They had two sons, the oldest was the same age as Georg, the Kornitzers' son. He was a tall lad with flax-blond hair who radiated the quiet self-confidence that he could take over the farm on a moment's notice: the cows, the apple trees, the parents, who will have grown old by then. In fact, he'd had to manage it alone with his mother and the Polish forced laborer. And they had a younger boy, who loved playing pranks, to whom Claire waved from a

distance when she came home to Bettwang in the evening on the post-office bus. He liked to hang out in her room and begged her to put on the record player. She did it to make him happy, but she also liked seeing the boy enjoy it as well as the fact that he wanted something that was not usual among farmers: listening to music. Shall we dance? she once asked him, but he declined. He didn't know how to dance. You can learn, if you want to, she said encouragingly. And she laid his hands on her shoulders and said, Listen, and smiled her most winning smile, Put your arms around me. Then she swayed and stomped away with him, tra-la-la-ing along with the melody from the phonograph, quietly putting up with his stumbling and buckling. See? she said, It's easy. And when the record ended, she burst out laughing, and her youthful dance partner straightened up a bit, as though the joint adventure with the big-city tenant had made him more cosmopolitan and grown up. A little, anyway. We'll do it again, said Claire, and pushed the boy out of the room before he could settle on the edge of her bed to hear another record. It's so much fun for the kid, she said to her husband. How much fun it was for her was as plain as the nose on her face. And on the first floor, the Pfempfle sometimes whispered, My word, after everything that Mrs. Kornitzer has been through she hasn't lost her good humor.