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I'm not afraid. She'd said to Ludwig. And I'm sticking to it. Iris crawled, as directed, over the stage floor. Always follow the director's instructions otherwise you'll get nowhere. (There are some lessons from the conservatory I could easily leave behind.) She crawled on her stomach, picturing herself singing as she did, summoning the feelings Cherubino's lines required. The feelings E.M. Demmenie demanded. She felt unwell. It was the first time in four months that she'd lain on her stomach. And now: crawling. Where did you read it can cause harm? Women bear healthy children in completely different circumstances and you, well-nourished, in safety. But I don't feel well when I do it! Me, who only ever sleeps on her stomach, now I sleep on my back. I lie awake, eyes wide open, all night long, and now, here on this American stage... no! My back can't take it. The obvious only occurred to her once her entire front was covered with dust, her jeans, jumper, elbows. Stop, she interrupted the rehearsal. We have to find another solution, Lizzy. I can't do it like that. *But you're vibrant, darling, what's the matter?*

Someone (she was now speaking German) who has deserted, who's eighteen and is declaring his love for humankind, doesn't crawl on the ground to do it. That's the whole reason he doesn't want to be in the army anymore. Because he no longer wants to crawl in the dirt, physically or figuratively. It makes no sense to me, so I can't sing any sense into it. *What's more, my back is killing me, my discs! At your tender age?* E.M. Demmenie looked at her doubtfully. (What kind of pig in a poke did I buy here? She's supposed to be young and now—disc problems?) Yes, I know, I'm eighteen, that's what you specified. Iris brushes the dust off her knees, then boyishly shuffles her feet a bit and lets all her joints go slack somehow. Fantastic, Lizzy thinks, that's absolutely fantastic, despite everything she knows her art: she's still Cherubino, even while arguing with me.

Break, Lizzy orders, a short one, ten-fifteen minutes. Bathroom break, cigarette break. Many more singers smoke than you'd expect (no surprise given the stress and constant attention to breathing). Lizzy and Iris remain on the stage, pacing off the lines that had been sketched out for Cherubino's movements in the courtroom, ending up at the lion's paw-shaped left foot of the giant writing desk that would dominate the stage set in the first act and in the third. Stacks of files as big as bedsheets lay on desktop. This could lead to one of the unlikely cases of my being killed by a piece of paper. Waves of giggling, suppressed. The situation suddenly struck Iris as incredibly funny. None of the factory workers from Portland, whom E. M. Demmenie actually had had flown in, left the stage during the break. They whispered to each other under and around the oversize judge's bench onto which the singers were lifted with a crane (Lizzy didn't think much of ladders), a swarm of—of what, actually? A swarm of women from Portland, Oregon, Iris finished the sentence to herself while E. M. Demmenie talked on, faster and faster, her words tripping over each other. Iris marveled at the speed with which the director was able to produce sounds and string them together. She produces at least ten times as many words as I do in a year—

I haven't listened to a thing she's said.

Iris forced herself to pay attention, there was a point to it, after all.

Then how would you do it? Lizzy asked in English at that very moment and Iris answered her in English since the polite thing to do is to speak in the language your interlocutor is most comfortable in.

I've thought about it. Speaking carefully and leaving extra space between her sentences—win some time, win some time, slow Lizzy down—Iris developed her vision of a sessile Cherubino.

He's the fixed point around which the other characters whirl. He sits; he's meant to be the witness, after all. Precisely because he's onstage so much, right, and only sings two arias but the ones the audience knows well, he's best positioned seated. Now and then he stands up, then it's a big deal. Not to sing; I can sing really well seated. His staying seated also emphasizes the fact that he's leaving the military. Sitting is not a typical stance for a soldier.

E. M. Demmenie listened.

Scratched her head.

Rubbed her chin.

Crossed her arms in front of her chest.

He has no choice but to refuse to bear witness, Iris continued after a short pause. In any case, that fits the arias' lyrics but he, too, the teenager eager to experience love, he, too, hopefully, will obviously refuse to assist the divorce. People should stay together. He still believes things like that. Precisely because the first buds of love are opening, he believes it can last forever. He has to believe it, otherwise he'd fall into despair right from the start and he wouldn't be the person he is; and it wouldn't be Mozart. Even children of divorced parents keep believing, at least in our circles (and Mozart is us) that things can work out. Something eternal. At last! Besides, Cherubino believes that after the war peace can reign, that peace can be manufactured and that's what he wants. Admittedly, in this opera he mostly shows this without words. Through his presence. *Put him on a chair and I'll do it.*

There she was again. Coolness. The blessing of a late birth. The good luck of living in this century and no other. The legacy of modernity spares you sentimentality and allow you to keep politeness to a minimum (with language, for example).

There are people who inspire you. Remarkably, E. M. Demmenie proved to be one. (Not just a person, a woman, Martha would have corrected her, Martha, Martha her suppressed, external, but all the more tenacious, conscience about women in public life.) Lizzy scrutinized Iris—am I now an endangered glacier, an as yet unexplored gold mine?—and her eyes: green, slightly weathered, but almost exactly the same color as mine, you have to look others in the eye. Then Lizzy nodded, once, twice, not more. *Okay, you'll sit on a chair.*