

What He Left – by Claudia I. Haas

MEMORY 2: March 1940; Geiringer apartment on the terrace.

(The lights change. There is a small balcony off an apartment in Amsterdam. HEINZ is on the balcony with his guitar. (The Merwedeplein.) EVA is 11. Heinz is 14. She can have a small change of clothing to help delineate the age difference. HEINZ is singing a song. (“Wayfaring Stranger.”) Do as much or as little of the song as you need to give EVA time to change a piece of her clothing and grab some sausages and apples.)

HEINZ

“I’m just a poor Wayfaring Stranger, passing through this world below.
There is no sickness, toil or danger, in that bright world to which I go.

I’m going there to see my father, I’m going there no more to roam.
I’m only going over Jordan. I’m only going over home.

(EVA enters with apples and sausages. They have a knife for cutting and they are quite pleased with their midnight shenanigans. They’re just a tad noisy.)

EVA

Why do you always play that song? It makes me sad.

HEINZ

It’s how I feel when the darkness comes.

EVA

Play something happy. For me. Please.

(HEINZ plays a little ragtime music. EVA leaps up and does an impromptu dance. She may add in a cartwheel or hang off the railings – something to show off her physical prowess and her joy of the moment. She ends with a few twirls.)

EVA

I’m getting dizzy!

HEINZ

Eat. You'll feel better. Promise me something.

EVA

Anything.

HEINZ

Promise me that whenever you hear music, you'll dance like that. Even if I'm not here.

EVA

Where are you going?

HEINZ

Someday, I hope to go to the University and study art and music.

EVA

You can do that in Amsterdam. I won't let you go anywhere else.

HEINZ

It won't be for years!

EVA

I promise you, if you try to go away, I'll ... lock the door and only open it to bring you food and water. And to have you tell me stories.

HEINZ

It's all in the future. I wouldn't worry your head about it now.

EVA

Good. This apple is sweet and sour at the same time - like a sweet that isn't a sweet. Isn't it amazing - the icebox is always stocked full of goodies. It's a wonder we don't get caught.

HEINZ

They know.

EVA

How would they know? They never hear us!

HEINZ

Eva! There's food missing all the time! How could they not know?

EVA

Then it's extra special to have a mother and father who let us rob the icebox.

(They are settled on the balcony, cutting the fruit and sausage and eating. A clock may chime in the distance.)

HEINZ

The evening star.

EVA

It's there every night.

HEINZ

You can count on it. It makes me feel safe to count on something. Look! The fog's rolling in. Soon it will be hard to see anything.

EVA

The streets are filled with shadows – it looks scary.

HEINZ

Quick! Over there – through the mist – something's moving. Look before it disappears! I think it's a ghost!

EVA

Where? I want to see it!

HEINZ

You missed it. You're too busy eating! Wait. Shh.

(Beat.)

EVA

What?

HEINZ

Be quiet! Is that a chain clanging in the distance?

(EVA listens intently.)

EVA

It is!

HEINZ

I think that's young Gustav roaming the canals. Creeping ... sneaking ... inching ... step by step... until his icy hand finds his victim!

(HEINZ touches EVA with something cold from their midnight treats. EVA jumps!)

EVA

What does he want?

HEINZ

You!

EVA

But you'll protect me.

HEINZ

Of course. Poor Gustav. I was told he died very young and is destined to roam these canals forever.

EVA

How did he die?

HEINZ

He was hanged – for stealing ... an apple!

(EVA may drop her apple.)

He was younger than us. The poor fellow was starving so he swiped an apple off a cart and paid for it with his life. Now he wanders the canals trying to rid himself of chains. The chains that weigh heavily upon him because he broke the law.

EVA

But - he was starving!

HEINZ

The law doesn't make exceptions for starving boys.

EVA

How do you know about Gustav?

HEINZ

My friend Herman told me. And you know what else? I met Gustav.

EVA

Was he here?

HEINZ

It was when I was working late to finish my sketches for art class. It was getting dark. My eyes were so tired, I curled up on the sculpting table and fell asleep! I was awakened by a cold mist that came over me.

EVA

Are you sure the window wasn't open?

HEINZ

Positive. And then an icy finger touched my forehead.

(HEINZ acts it out. Perhaps he touches EVA's forehead.)

I bolted upright. And there was this child staring at me with bloodshot eyes. His neck was covered in chains. I froze. I couldn't even scream. And then he gestured for me to follow him. I felt like my own body was tied up in his mysterious chains. I didn't want to go with him but I had no choice. The invisible chains dragged me forward and soon I was going down the dark stairs and into the cold. I heard crying. I thought it was a baby. Or maybe – it was a cat!

(Heinz lets out a cat cry. EVA jumps.)

But then there was such a wail. (Heinz lets out a long wail.) It entered my body and I shuddered. (They both shudder.) I didn't want to go any further. The streets were empty. There was nobody about. Only me and Gustav-the-ghost. He was leading me to my doom.

EVA

Don't follow him!

HEINZ

I had to. The invisible chains were alive. They moved me inch-by-inch, step-by-step until I thought I was being led into a canal where I would drown in the frigid night.

EVA

You can't die.

HEINZ

Evertje – I'm here, aren't I? (Beat.) We reached a bridge and the crying continued. Was someone in the canal? Where was it coming from? And then I looked up.

(HEINZ and EVA look up. A full beat or two of silence. Until EVA is beside herself.)

EVA

Tell me.

HEINZ

There was a child. Way up on the highest branch. He was terrified. I knew Gustav brought me here to rescue him.

EVA

But – you’re afraid of heights.

HEINZ

I know! But I did what Pappy told me when we went mountain climbing. I kept my eyes upward and never looked down. Slowly I inched up the tree. One small step at a time. And then suddenly –

(HEINZ lets out a gasp and is silent.)

EVA

Suddenly

HEINZ

The little boy jumped on my shoulder and held me tight. And very carefully, I slid down. As soon as I put the boy on the ground, he hugged me and ran away. And then Gustav did the strangest thing. He removed one of his chains and threw it into the canal and disappeared into the mist.

EVA

You must have been so scared.

HEINZ

I was. But I think Gustav’s a good sort of ghost. I think every time he does a good deed, he is able to shake off another chain. When the chains are gone, he will no longer be a ghost and will be able to rest in peace.

EVA

You’re making this up!

HEINZ

Who knows? Have another apple slice.

EVA

This is the perfect evening. Play one more song before we go inside.

(HEINZ plays “Lovely Evening.” He starts to sing and EVA joins in. NOTE: You may change the song to something in public domain that would

fit the times and the scene. HEINZ abruptly stops.)

EVA

What's wrong?

HEINZ

There's a policeman on the street.

EVA

It doesn't matter. We're not in Vienna anymore. We're safe. We're finally safe.

HEINZ

We should go inside.

(They exit as the lights change.)