

Vorarlberg

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Seated on the train, Erich stared out the window at the passing countryside and caught himself thinking back on the changes the past year had brought. He felt older. He was moving further and further away from the past and he knew it. Though he was not yet a man, he could no longer identify with the boy he had once been. Pulling himself back to the present moment, his focus shifted to the person seated across from him. The one friend he had in the world absentmindedly chewed on the nail of his thumb as his eyes perused the notes of a piece he already knew by heart. For his solo in this year's competition their teacher had selected Grieg's Våren . Erich watched Gustav in silence and smiled to himself. It amused him that someone with so much skill and experience could still suffer from last minute nerves before a petty little Austro-Hungarian Youth Orchestra concert. There would be students representing four conservatories attending the competition this time and the participants, most of them hormone-driven males aged sixteen to nineteen, would be lodging in a handful of rooms in an old building located in the vicinity of the concert hall. The setup was fairly straightforward that year. Rooms 1-3 were reserved for their group. Four beds per room, two boys to a bed. Old military-style cots that creaked in protest at even the smallest movement, covered with coarse white sheets that smelled of the crisp mountain breeze. Erich and Gustav were the youngest among the boys assigned to Room 3. Like all the other rooms in the hostel it was simple but cosy with a modest gas lantern on each of the two oak nightstands, a large window to let in the sunlight during the day and the regulation wooden cross nailed to the wall above it. The sleeping quarters they were to share for the next six days. It was rather cramped once all of its occupants were inside - instruments, bags and all - but nobody complained. Their teacher did his best to enforce a measure of discipline amongst the group of adolescents under his care, but it had been a long and strenuous day and by ten o'clock he had reached the end of his strength and gone to bed. Thankfully, he would be sharing with the boys at the end of the hall in Room 1. Unlike the poor bastards in the other two who were forced to keep quiet, the boys in Room 3 took full advantage of their good fortune and got to whispering amongst themselves after lights out. It started with a few snide comments about the competition, then a bit of gossip about some of the other boys in their own group who were not in the room. One older boy by the name of Deichmayr told a dirty joke that only half of the room understood but which all felt pressured to laugh at. The subject matter grew bawdier from there, reaching its peak when

Deichmayr and another young man named Weber regaled the others with what passed at that point in their development as sexual encounters. Gustav listened passively to the nonsense the others offered up in response and Erich, not amused by the one-upmanship of his peers, interjected with “puerile fools, the lot of you”. Fairly mild, considering the potential retorts in his arsenal, but it promptly took the wind out of the boys’ sails, junior and senior alike and Gustav smiled to himself. It was moments like these that made him proud to have a friend who was so much more mature than his sixteen years. Erich may not have been liked amongst the other boys, but there was a strict pecking order in the group and as far as the eight of them in that room went, he was at the top. As midnight approached the boys withdrew to their beds and the whispers gradually died down as, one by one, they dropped off. The quiet summer breeze wafted lazily in through the open window but the clouds stifled any moonlight that might have shined into the little room. A stronger gust of wind threw back the shutter, making it rap against the wall and Erich turned over, his arm falling on Gustav’s chest and instinctively curling around him in a possessive half-embrace. Gustav stirred but did not wake. A gentle rain began to fall. Half asleep, Erich pulled Gustav closer and took in the warm scent of his body. The two had slept together in confined spaces many times and it often happened that their bodies accidentally made contact, but it was all completely innocent and never meant anything. But something was different about that night. Erich had been in the middle of a splendidly primitive dream that had left his cock completely stiff, something he became vaguely aware of when his lower body unwittingly brushed against his friend’s thigh. It felt good and he let out a little moan of contentment, just loud enough to wrench Gustav from his slumber. With enough presence of mind to realise he had drifted too close to Erich’s side of the bed, Gustav emitted a sleepy sigh and budged over, just as he would have on any other night. Except this time Erich’s arm stayed draped across his friend’s side, hand dangling limply from the wrist. Gustav thought nothing of it and instantly slipped back into the nothingness of sleep. Still somewhere between consciousness and dreaming, Erich snuggled up close to Gustav once more. With the blind confidence of a sleepwalker his hand came up and gripped Gustav’s shoulder, hugged him gently but firmly. His mouth came to rest upon the back of his neck. The heat of his skin was so inviting and Erich’s lips parted, seemingly of their own accord, and kissed him there. Gustav did not react, but went on sleeping; his calm, steady breathing causing his chest to slowly rise and fall. Erich, too, gave in to sleep, resurfacing a moment later to find his hand gripping the sleeve of Gustav’s nightshirt, his lower body impulsively rocking against Gustav’s in gentle, rhythmic movements. Though Gustav had not yet awakened, he unconsciously attempted to move away from Erich again. But instead of letting go Erich held on tightly, pulling Gustav closer to him. His hand, one step ahead of his thoughts, was sliding down the front of Gustav’s body and he felt an almost electrical surge when it came to rest upon the semi-erect form between his friend’s legs. On a deeply subconscious level it was pleasurable to touch so he ran his fingertips over it, then his palm. Gustav moaned quietly but his breathing remained calm and steady. Awake and excited now, Erich began to rub the solid protrusion beneath his palm; softly at first and then a little more firmly. Through the thin fabric of his friend’s underwear he felt the warmth of his member, felt it throb and swell at his touch. He could no longer hear breathing and knew Gustav must be awake. The two pretended,

rather unconvincingly, to still be asleep as Erich resumed kissing Gustav's neck and coaxed him all the way over to his side of the bed. There wasn't much room to start with and once he had succeeded, he was halfway on top of Gustav. His mouth wandered close to Gustav's but their lips did not meet. Erich slipped his hand beneath the waistband of Gustav's long underwear, heart racing as his fingertips made their downward journey over hot, downy skin, through soft curls... Gustav reacted slightly when Erich's fingertips made contact with his naked flesh, but held still and let it happen. With shallow breaths and closed eyes, the boys surrendered to the deeply shameful urgings of their youthful loins. They knew what they were doing was incredibly naughty, dirty, and wrong but this awareness was little more than a faint warning in the face of their screaming desire. Tentatively Erich began to move his hand up and down, delighting at the subtle way Gustav's muscles tensed in response to his touch; the way his jagged breaths caught in his throat and his sex twitched each time his foreskin was drawn back and forth over his sensitive tip. Erich liked that he could cause these changes in his friend. Liked the fact that he could make him writhe like that under the sheets, wet and panting where he had, just minutes earlier, been sleeping innocently. Rubbing his own body against Gustav's all the while, Erich soon felt the stimulation becoming too much for him. But before he could even think of slowing down he was distracted by the restrained sounds of his friend coming. The soft, little moans pleased Erich greatly and with a self-satisfied grin he soon achieved his own quiet climax. A few moments of closeness followed before he rolled off of Gustav and onto his back, his belly wet and his chest heaving. When Erich awoke the next morning Gustav was already gone. Apart from the two younger members of the group all of the other boys were up and about, getting dressed and clumsily attempting to make their beds without disturbing their neighbours - an uncharacteristic show of consideration which would fall apart considerably by the second day and vanish completely by the third. Erich did not see Gustav until breakfast and neither of them so much as hinted at what had happened the night before. The days dragged on and things went on in much the same manner as they always had. Their group picked up second place in two categories and Gustav was awarded first prize for his solo performance on Day Three. But those two highlights aside, the competition week had been a dreary affair. It had rained all week, the sort of weather that guaranteed low spirits. By Day Four the tediousness of enforced indoor confinement had gotten to all of them and Erich had lost his temper with Gustav that morning, which resulted in the two avoiding each other as far as was possible for the rest of the day. With no one else to talk to, Erich became even grumpier and when the others headed into the town to spend what little money they had been given. Erich headed back to the room to sulk. Not half a minute after he had set off toward the hostel it began to rain. Erich returned to the room, dripping and coughing, to find Gustav there. He was in a solemn mood and without exchanging a word Erich knew it was not down to their argument. It was something else. "What happened?" he asked in his least aggressive tone. "My father is dead," Gustav answered softly. After a considerable pause Erich replied, "I'm sorry" and Gustav muttered his polite thanks. "I shall have to leave early for Freudenthal. Mother will need me." "Of course," Erich said, nodding his understanding. He instantly detested the thought of spending the remainder of the week there without his friend, but refused to let it show. Another moment of silence followed before he spoke again. "Is

there anything I can do?" Gustav shook his head, his eyes cast downward and Erich felt a deep sympathy for his friend, along with an underlying sense of guilt for his lack of patience - not just that day but in general - and he inwardly resolved to be a better friend to Gustav, as he so often did following such moments of insight. "I am sorry," he repeated softly. Gustav looked up and Erich was seized by a strong pang of desire the second their eyes met. Something in the stoic vulnerability of his grieving friend filled him with a profound sense of longing he couldn't quite understand. A euphoric warmth spread through his body and an inexplicable force drew him to Gustav, just as it had done that night four days earlier. Only now it was stronger. Erich approached Gustav and reached up to stroke his cheek, but Gustav turned his head, recoiling slightly at his touch. "What's wrong?" After a little pause Gustav quietly replied, "We shouldn't." Erich's insides churned with self-loathing, with frustration, rage and disappointment. He agreed with his friend's words, but at the same time every fibre of his being rejected them. "Why not?" he felt his lips form the words, a whisper barely audible above the rain, the question posed before he'd even had time to consider what he was saying. Gustav had no answer and averted his eyes. A minute passed that felt like an age. The wrongness of it, they both thought to themselves. That's why not. Gustav did not know why he wasn't more surprised at his friend's advance. He couldn't bring himself to look at Erich but could feel his eyes upon him like a hard slap across the face. The intensity of the moment they had shared the other night still a fresh wound in his memory, the guilt a vicious beast gnawing at his conscience. He bore just as much of the blame for this as Erich, if not more. He came from a strong family, a house of values, of God-fearing decency. His friend lacked this solid ground beneath his feet and thus his behaviour could be pardoned, but Gustav knew better. And yet the urging of his loins was too powerful. The sense of morality his parents, his teachers and his priest had worked for years to instill in him was strong, but this... this was stronger. The good boy did not stand a chance against the depraved and wanton young man he was fast becoming. The prospect of shame and the enticing promise of a heaven he was not meant to know weighed heavily on Erich's heart too as his eyes wandered over his friend's face. It was so familiar, that face, but the feelings it evoked in him were completely foreign to him. With a new interest he took in every detail, saw for the first time the perfection in every lash and the exquisite beauty of the eyes they veiled. He wanted to touch that flawless alabaster skin, to run his fingers through that unruly caramel hair. He wanted to know how those lips would feel upon his; what it would taste like to claim ownership of that mouth. And so he moved closer, gently pressing Gustav against the wall, and touched his fingertips to his chin. Gustav closed his eyes and slowly turned his face to Erich's. Their bodies were close enough for each of them to feel the heat radiating from the other's skin, but not quite touching. The kiss was exploratory and yet cautious. It was the most sensual moment of Erich's life. They savoured the ethereal moment, knowing full well that it would draw to a close and that when it did, nothing would ever be the same again. Something big awaited them at the end of it, something wonderful and frightening. Erich took off his shirt and sat down on the edge of the bed before moving on to his trousers. It was dark out. The others would be returning soon and he knew he didn't have much time. "Come here," he whispered, turning down the sheets before extinguishing the lamp. Without question Gustav obeyed

and Erich held him a while, stroked the side of his face, his arms, his hair. Piece by piece, Erich slowly slipped out of the remainder of his wet clothes and pulled the sheet over them while his mouth sought out and found his friend's. An affectionate hand wandered over Gustav's shoulder and caressed his arm. A deceptively calm moment of intimacy that stretched out into an eternity. Inside, Erich was on fire. His heart hammered away in his chest and he was too aroused to speak. Gustav was trembling ever so slightly, too overwhelmed by his friend's touch to notice. His throat felt dry and tight, his muscles tense with anticipation. With a grace uncommon to one so young Erich climbed on top of Gustav and began to undress him. There wasn't much to remove, just a simple cotton undershirt and underwear. Erich lay down on him and both of them held their breath, their pulses racing excitedly. The strange, new sensation of their naked bodies touching filled their minds with dangerous and exciting thoughts. They were far from home and dizzy with freedom, but in many ways they were still youngsters and they both knew it. Gustav's breath caught in his throat when he felt Erich's hand between legs. Warm fingers traversed the most private parts of his body with such fearless confidence and he arched his back in pleasure. Erich leaned over and kissed Gustav again, sinking his tongue deep into Gustav's mouth and revelling in the taste and texture before pulling away, flushed and out of breath. The night air was calm and heavy with promise. The rain had slowed to a steady drizzle. Erich felt an intense aching between his legs and a hot rush of adrenaline coursed through his veins as he gazed down at the pale form beneath him, barely visible in the thick darkness of the room. What little he could see of it was beautiful. Desirable. Why not? Erich asked himself. Would it be so wrong? Whether the answer was yes or no, it was not meant to be that night. The faint sound of voices approached on the other side of the door and with a resigned sigh Erich rolled off of Gustav and onto his own side of the bed. Dreading the long, frustrating night ahead of him, Erich turned his back to Gustav and closed his eyes.