

## Edie in Vienna

Years after she'd first heard about it, Edie finally learned something more about her grandfather Jack's NFT habit, one afternoon while she was rifling around in her mother's studio, searching for drugs. She would often enjoy a spare Clonazepam (or two, or three) of Sonia's, which Edie would secrete from the small drawer at the center the desk on the far wall of her office. She'd walk in, tiptoeing around easels and buckets of paint, careful not to slip on the rough-strewn papers and scraps of canvas scattered all over the floor, navigating this labyrinth of junk all the way across the long room, where the desk was nestled between two tree-shaded windows facing the street from the third floor of their Brooklyn house. But this afternoon, Edie found only the same meaningless clutter that always accompanied this drawer's central, structuring element, now conspicuously missing: the bright-orange little RX pillbottle of prescription benzodiazepines with her mother's name on it.

On another day, Edie might have stopped looking the moment she saw that the bottle was missing from the drawer, consigning herself to some other activity for the evening, but this was a special occasion: her two older brothers, Tom and Mike, both long since moved out, were in town, and they'd asked her to help them celebrate by finding their mother's pills. So, Edie walked around, rifling through things that had been collecting in the corners and on the floor by the walls for years: crates and piles full of papers, old brushes, binders with photos in them, charging cords of outdated appliances, CDs, small pieces of wood, and so on, all covered in layers of various thickness of dust and dried flecks of paint. She was a mess within minutes, covered in the excretions of the room, and was about to give up when she found an old-looking, yet intact gray envelope, addressed to her mother, postmarked from several years before and with the following return address stamped on its upper-right-hand corner:

Jack Bomer  
~~Hildegard Stalzer~~  
Krieglergasse 4  
1030 Wien – Austria

The sight of that address, and the particularly gray, rubbery feel and smell of the envelope brought back to her, vividly and at once, the memory of her last visit to her grandparents' old apartment. She sat down with the envelope in her hands, her long, bony legs stretched out over the floor, before pulling apart the seal with her fingers and opening it. She found a letter.

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For years, Sonia had reproached her father for poorly managing what little money he had inherited and earned throughout his life. The latter was greater than the former; but when Jack died, throwing himself out of a window in one of his habitual fits of madness, she found his accounts to be a mess, most of them negative or empty. Their statements were full of bizarre expenditures, like donations to churches he had never been a part of and plane tickets for trips he could not have taken. Most devastating of all, perhaps, were the many items of clothing and jewelry he had apparently bought for his wife, Hilde, Sonia's mother, despite the fact that she had died of ovarian cancer five years before. Overwhelmed with grief, Sonia could hardly handle her responsibilities as his executor, and selling everything she could of the estate, she was barely able to cover his losses, producing nothing of the windfall she'd expected.

Sonia had flown to Vienna as soon as she'd heard that her father was in the hospital—though he died before she arrived—and her husband, Dick, and their three children, Tom, Mike, and Edie, were just a few days behind her. The four of them boarded a plane together one Thursday afternoon in October. Edie, starting her first year of high school, was irritated because she had been hoping to go to a party that Saturday night; Mike, a senior in high school, was already

unapproachably surly by default. Tom came down from college for the occasion. As they drove to the airport, and went through security and the other checkpoints, Dick, usually pleased by the united presence of his three children and, in such situations, an inexhaustible source of grins and corny jokes, was silent this afternoon. His brow was set with worry about the state his wife would be in when they arrived, often a mess as she was even in the best of circumstances. The four of them were spread out throughout the plane, and Edie, alone between two fat, silent men, watched a Batman movie and slept for a bit.

When they arrived in Vienna, they found Sonia alone in her parents' old apartment. She was surrounded by trash and lying on the floor, screaming between sobs and basically foaming at the mouth. Much of their family life had always been organized around the rise and fall of Sonia's emotions, but her grief at her father's death so newly intense that it immediately became clear they had neither a vocabulary nor a plan of action for it. The kids, all tall as adults, mulled around uncomfortably with their suitcases, trying to find places to stand among the strewn accumulations of geriatric life that their grandfather had left behind. Dick, despite the immediate, sunken feeling he experienced the moment he saw his wife, rushed to her side. He managed to get her up, off the floor and onto a couch, under a blanket, and as he was doing so Edie wandered away from the whole scene towards the room she remembered she had stayed in when she had last come to visit her grandparents in Vienna as a small child. She found the same fold-down beds as before, in a room that otherwise would have functioned as something like a parlor or a second living room, and, pulling hers down from its cavity in the wall, she inhaled a familiar scent of its actinomycal must. Bored, she got onto the bed, now small under her long frame, and took out her laptop.

After an hour or so, Sonia was more or less contained, and the family went out for dinner to a cafe down the street. At their table, over pale Silvaner, Wienerschnitzel and wilting cabbage,

Dick and Sonia explained to the children the run of the show for the next few days. The two of them would try to sort out the legal and financial matters that required Sonia's presence within the coming week. During the weekend leading up to that, they would try to get the apartment organized, and start to make a plan for selling off the furniture and other belongings. The kids would be asked to help with this, and any other tasks that required any form of manual labor, as well as to stay on top of their homework, but other than that, they could do as they pleased. They were free to explore the city, if they liked, as long as they all traveled together: Edie was still too young to walk around strange, dim Vienna by herself, and because of this, Dick said pointedly, Tom and Mike were required to always invite her to tag along when they left.

Whatever concerns Dick and Sonia may have had about Edie's wandering the streets were unfounded, at least at first. She and her brothers took the opportunity of the unplanned vacation to play hours and hours of uninterrupted video games on their laptops in the poorly-lit living room. Edie, excluded from Tom and Mike's gaming sessions for as long as she could remember, watched over their shoulders as their virtual fighters threw men to the ground with bullets from the long weapons taking up much of their screens, with grenades and knife thrusts, blood flashing around them until they too eventually succumbed and fell, only to respawn again and again. She played a historical strategy game, *Europa Universalis IV*. As she roleplayed the domination of the European continent by the Hapsburg empire, taking it to extremes it could never quite reach in its real life, she occasionally looked up from her bed at her brothers' coarse-throated cheers and grunts of victory and dismay. She watched their backs contort in suspense as they twitched in response to virtual bullets and grenades, the two of them nearly indistinguishable from the shoulders down, long bony frames under identically tousled messes of hair, Mike's bright red, Tom's brown. Having lived with them for years by now, of course, Edie was long past wondering at their

preference for such physically active gaming experiences, but she could still enjoy a sense of superiority at her own game and the habits it cultivated: her practice of careful planning and management, her network of international alliances and betrayals, her deliberate pruning of this representational space for growth.

Late into the second night, however, the boys' interest in unsupervised drinking did overcome their desire to game. That evening, after a long, gray day in which Dick and Sonia were inexplicably missing for hours, Tom and Mike got ready without saying a word to Edie. They came over to her as the sun was going down, the last of its reddening autumn glow filtering into the apartment through their grandparents' venetian blinds, forming burning shapes with long straight edges scattered across its myriad surfaces. Tom was leading the charge, and Mike's face was illuminated behind him as they stood over Edie in their jackets. She noticed he seemed more ambivalent than Tom, as he often did, almost apologetic as his older brother spoke for the two of them, making his distaste clear while inviting Edie to come along in words only. But Tom's attempts at discouragement were unnecessary, as Edie had no intentions of joining them. She waved Mike goodbye as they passed through the apartment's front door. As soon as they'd been gone for ten minutes, she checked on her parents, and, finding them locked away in the master bedroom, she got herself a glass of her mother's white wine from the fridge and went into the shower. Despite its smell of weird, ancient soaps, reminding her of her long-dead grandmother, she was able to make herself come using the detachable showerhead, holding on to the support railing as her legs trembled, and, after drying off, she put on a long t-shirt and sweatpants and got back into bed.

As she was booting her laptop back up, she heard her parents come out of the bedroom.

Did they go out? Sonia said.

I think so, said Dick.

Eddie, moving as quietly as possible, put her glass of wine under her bed and held her laptop like a talisman, staring out over it as she listened. She heard her mother sigh, and then sob.

What a mess, Dick said. Her mother's little cries continued for a while, and then they became the startling wails that they'd heard when they first got into the apartment, which would become a fixture of their life for several years to come.

Quickly losing interest, Eddie turned her video game back on, and it was another ten minutes or so until the crying subsided, and she heard, between sniffles, her mother say: Dick, what even *is* an NFT?

I don't know, love, he said, and then paused for a while. Well, they're kind of like these digital, collectible tokens, he finally continued, that use this thing called the blockchain. But what does that *mean*?! Sonia cried, losing the end of the last word into another sob, this one muffled, presumably by Dick's shoulder and shirt. It doesn't matter, Eddie heard him say. Where *are* they? It doesn't matter.

After a while, Dick and Sonia quieted down, and Eddie, finally getting bored of her game, decided to read a little bit before going to sleep. She had forgotten to bring a book, so she looked around the apartment, remembering a time not long ago when her grandfather, smiling at her, had been excited to share and talk about books. She stopped before the full, dark shelves, trying to make out English titles on the spines among the German, French and Italian, but then her attention was caught by a white jacket on a small table that was next to one of the easy chairs in the room. She wiped the dust off and brought it back to her bed. Opening it to the bookmark, she was surprised to find a chapter that took place in Vienna, or that began in Israel and went to Vienna, and she read for a while in confusion as one Heimito Künster narrated to someone who was not

named how he and a Mexican man named Ulises Lima had met in a prison in Beersheba, Israel, and had been released and had flown to Vienna. There they had robbed a handful of people, and had eaten mostly bread, and had often been hungry, and had eventually been attacked by old friends of Heimito's in a Viennese park and then had been arrested again and then had eventually parted ways. It was winding and confusing, with Heimito always talking about Jews manufacturing atomic bombs under tombs in Israel, and a particularly strange paragraph in which a policeman lectured the two men and the once-friends of Heimito's in a bar about things such as dignity, tradition, will, justice, betrayal, and punishment. Edie recalled how her late grandmother Hilde had had a younger brother, who Edie had briefly known as Uncle Heimo. She thought about her brothers, out there on the streets of Vienna, and she wondered if the park where Heimito and Ulises had been attacked could be nearby. She typed one of the streets mentioned in the chapter into Google maps and found what she thought was probably the park, a thirty-minute walk directly south. She supposed it was unlikely that her brothers had gone that far. She supposed as well that she probably didn't have anything to worry about, that her grandparents must have been living in a safe neighborhood, and that the violence she was reading about hadn't been real, that the novel she was reading was just that, after all: a novel. Still, she couldn't help but feel a sense of peculiar unease when she pictured her brothers out there, in the unfamiliar night, their reddened eyes squinting after so many hours playing out computerized fantasies of violence, crew cuts and clean blue jeans and J-Crew sweaters all sticking out profoundly in Edie's new image of Vienna, an image whose vividness and dramatic insistence quickly caused it to be superimposed over whatever limited idea of it she may have formed on her own. For the rest of the week, and for years after their return to the States, the city would look like this in Edie's eye, not like anything she saw herself while walking around: old, dark, coiling around the edges with histories both told

and hidden, gruesome and fantastical, each of these strains like a pair of dark eyes in the rooms and streets where they followed her drinking brothers.

...

The letter Edie found in her mother's studio began as follows:

*Dear Sonia,*

*Your mother is getting worse. She's always been getting worse; what I really mean is that the rate at which her condition is worsening has begun to accelerate rapidly. I can't take this anymore. Last night we had the Klaschreffes over for dinner. You know how much I hate them. I only ever put up with them because Hilde insisted we do. But Hilde is no longer here to tolerate them, and so it's just me for both of us. I can't do it. They invited themselves over like they always do, and they brought nothing, and they sit down expectantly and immediately things start to go wrong. Hilde can't cook dinner anymore, so I'm trying to—which is enough of a catastrophe if it's just the two of us: imagine me trying to cook for four people!—and the Klauschreffes right away start talking about how they wish it was Hilde cooking. You are going to poison us, man!, they wanted to say, I am sure of it, they're making jokes while I'm struggling, and meanwhile Hilde can only be sensing that something's going wrong, and she's getting confused. And you know what happens after that.*

*My love is gone, Sonia. She's barely there when she is at all, an echo of some parts of herself remain in her body, which walks around the house and mumbles and sometimes embraces me, but it's not her anymore. Hilde has gone to be with our Lord. I know what you're going to say, and I'm sorry that this time I won't be around to hear it, but it is honestly blissful to know that for once in my life I can receive the word of God and not have anyone around to tell me that I don't hear it. I'm not crazy, Sonia. He speaks to me, and He tells me that Hilde is with Him. He*



*tells me that they're waiting for me together, and that it is only a matter of time before I come to join them. He said it's not a sin if I take my own life, because half of me is already gone, with her, and because she's not in her body anymore it's not a sin either if I take both of our lives on Earth together. He actually asked me to, Sonia. I'm still not sure if I can do it, but I want you to know that He asked me to. You once knew God, when you were a child. You spoke to him so lovingly then. Maybe you'll find Him again someday. Can you imagine the glory it is to feel his voice enter your body, to know His will expressed in you, to have all uncertainty and pain fall away? It is a light without light, it is blinding of the other receptivities of the soul, my dear, it caresses and heals and uplifts. He told me so many more things. I wish I had time to tell them all to you now. But most important is that he told me that my music is already listened to in heaven, and that I'll get to keep playing when I die, with Hilde, and someday you, and your children, your wonderful children, and Dick too if he'll join us, though your time is not now, and so I can't take you with me. But I have to go now, I can already feel this body falling away from me. I have no more time, I have to reach there, now.*

*Sonia, you know your mother and I always wanted to leave behind something nice for you, but things have been complicated here. Your mother's treatment has not been cheap, and I've had other expenses that I wouldn't have expected. God has called on me to do great things for him. Some of these have required the deployment of my material resources. It's vulgar, but it is ultimately his Word. Who would I be to question it? I have no doubt in my heart that he has a plan to take care of you and Dick, my dear, and your children too. I put one thing aside for you, though, that I believe in time will come to be of great value, both material and spiritual. I know it will be because God made it clear to me in another message.*

Hey!

There was a shadow in the doorway. Edie jumped, but it wasn't her mother—only Mike.

Any luck?

Mike's hair was rough, as though he had just gotten out of bed, like it always was, no less than it was ever impossibly red. He had on his de facto uniform of a pale blue button down, rolled up to the elbows and open almost down to his belly, thankfully guarded by a white crew neck undershirt. Edie liked to tease him and call this style 'Frat casual.'

No, Edie said. I couldn't find them anywhere. I did find this old letter from Opa, though.

Huh, said Mike. That's interesting. He stood in the doorway for a second longer and then turned around. Well, let us know if you find anything, he said.

Okay, Edie said to his receding back. She continued reading.

*This message, Sonia, was not through my own body, like so many of them are, but through a young man I met in a cafe yesterday afternoon. He was trying to order a beer, and his German was so terrible that I recognized him to be an American right away. We began to talk. He spoke to me of a technology that was so unmistakable to me, from the moment he started talking, as being not of this Earth, but rather an expression of the Divine. His description of it reminded me of the Gnostic diagrams of Ophite, representing the angels, a chain of carefully aligned and overlapping circles (he seemed to want to call them 'blocks', but I know what he was really trying to say) that together provide absolute verification of identity, a touch of divine certainty, Sonia, in a world you and I both know is far too unsure of itself, and that has strayed horribly from its own divine self-knowledge as it has from God. Sonia, you know too for how long as a young man I was steeped in the theologians and the history of my faith, and so you can imagine how great a joy this brought me to hear it, only gently encoded, issue forth from the mouth of this young man. He had no idea what he was saying, of course; hearing him speak of this 'blockchain' was like reading of Ezekiel telling the Israelites about his visitation by the many-wheeled-and-headed Angels of God. The details of what he was talking about escaped me a bit. It doesn't matter. Someday this may appear written, as Ezekiel's word does, for future generations: I'll have plenty of time to*

*pray and think upon it when I'm in heaven with your mother. But this young man's voice touched me, just as God's does, and so I knew that I was in a situation to listen carefully. If I was not in a position to grasp the details of the schema he described, then I was at least to seek out His will within and underneath the words.*

*This young man told me his name was Plush, which is strange, Sonia, but already in the presence of God's will, what was I to do to question him? It turned out that he needed some help paying some bills, not only at the cafe we were at but at his hostel, too, and for his airfare to get out of Vienna. I gave him what he asked for and he thanked me, profusely. He spoke to me of Raphael, the archangel, and told me that through his technology he could deliver him to you, Sonia, in Brooklyn, to you and your boys and Dick and Edie. He made me write down his address, and then the following words:*

*Plush Masters  
Crypto Design Studios  
401 Bond St, Ste. 7a  
Brooklyn, NY 11231*

*'NFT – Raphael – Cryptokitty'*

*I don't know what any of that means, but he told me that if you sought him there, he would deliver Raphael to you. I know that he will. He had the feeling of God about him.*

*I love you, Sonia. I love you and Dick and Tom and Mike and Edie so much. I still have doubts, Sonia. I can't help but feel at times that I won't see you again, and in this moment I feel fear and confusion, even worse than that which I feel every day living with what's left of your mother. But then I remember what God has told me, and I know that I will see you all soon. If heaven is as glorious as they say it is, perhaps time can pass through it in different ways than it does on Earth, and by the time I get there you all will be there already with me. I hope that this is the case.*

*But if I have to wait, I will. One more time until the mountain comes. I love you,  
Sonia.*

*Dad*

...

That night, Edie, Tom, Mike and Sonia all sat down together for dinner. Edie was now seventeen, a senior in high school; Dick had long since left, absconded with a young new wife to Florida, and so Edie and Sonia lived alone here on his alimony payments in her childhood home. In the fall she would move out to go to college. But for now it was spring, and the days waxed back and forth between cool wet and energizing warmth, producing an effect on evenings such as this one in which a very fine mist surrounded the streetlamps and the lit windows of buildings in the distance, an effect Edie loved for the way it made the slightest of tugs away from the definiteness of the boundaries between objects.

It was such a special treat, Sonia said as she lurched about the house, to have all of the children back together, all at once, what a lucky mother she was, she said again and again, rocks glass of vodka and ice gathering fog in her hand as she moved. She looked around herself confusedly as she did so, as if she didn't know what else to say. It was true that the boys were rarely here at all, let alone together: Mike, now in his third year of college, was flying out of JFK the next morning for a spring break trip; and Tom, now living in Boston, happened to be in town that weekend for work. Edie could see clear discomfort on their faces as they sat in the warm light of their mother's kitchen, Bud lights in hand, watching her babble as she drank herself basically into a stupor, her regular evening routine for years now.

There was a knock at the door, and Edie took some money from her mother's purse, paid the delivery guy, and brought the Thai food to the table. The four of them sat down to eat, not saying

much until Edie, thinking about the letter upstairs, asked her mother: Hey, did you ever get that NFT from dad?

Sonia almost spit out the mouthful of drink she had just taken. What? she said, her face twisted up with rage, disbelief. Edie recognized her mistake right away. Her ex-husband was her least favorite thing to talk about: she preferred to pretend that he didn't exist.

Oh, shit, I mean—your dad. Did you ever get that NFT from *your* dad?

Sonia's facial expression barely changed, the slightest bit of confusion entering into her pain and anger. My dad? she said. NFT?

Yeah, Edie said. But she wasn't sure what to say next. She didn't want to admit to her mother that she'd been going through her stuff upstairs, she was now realizing. She should have thought of that before she spoke, she thought to herself as she looked around at her brothers for help. Tom's face was stone-still, either perfectly feigning disinterest or the real thing, and Mike's wasn't much better.

What are you talking about? Sonia said. How do you—what makes you... Why do you think my father had an NFT?

I don't know, Edie said, trying to smile. I think I remember hearing you and—you talking about it in Vienna.

Sonia looked at her for a long time. Finally she said, Your grandfather was a paranoid schizophrenic. He had delusions, and at the end of his life, he gave away almost all of his money.

Edie already knew all of this. Right, but I thought maybe—

Thought what? Sonia demanded, and Edie was silent.

...

Later that night, after Sonia was comfortably established with her bottle and bucket of ice in front of the TV, Edie put the letter from her grandfather into her jacket pocket and walked out the front door. Tom and Mike had gone out right after dinner, as they often did when they were in town, moments after Sonia had asked them to clear the table. But Edie knew where to find them. She took a right, walking down to the end of her block, and then another right onto Hoyt Street. A spring wind blew through the trees, their young but already full leaves casting dynamic patterns of shadow against the orange glow of the streetlamps. Staying across the street from the projects, Edie walked down Hoyt as far as President, where she came across the façade of The Garden Inn.

The bartender said hello to her as she walked in, and she went right through the empty room to the backyard, where she found Tom and Mike smoking over a beer. Each was like a modulated double of the other as they looked up at her in surprise, comically identical in every aspect of clothing, build, and haircut, differing only in color—Mike’s ginger-tone hair and face and eyes against Tom’s brown and blonde, Mike’s shirt blue against Tom’s purple—and the tone of the expression of their faces: Tom’s undercut with hardly suppressed distaste, and Mike’s betraying a genuine curiosity.

Edie! said one. Edie, said the other. What are you doing here?

I have something I have to ask you guys about. Edie approached the round picnic table they were at, its sun umbrella still extended uselessly in the night. Can I sit down?

Sure, said Tom. You want a Shirley Temple or something?

No thanks. Edie sat. Remember that letter I mentioned at dinner?

Oh yeah, said Mike.

What the fuck was that about? said Tom. He took a drag of his cigarette.

Mike continued: Was that what you were looking at when I passed you in the hallway?

Yeah, Edie said. It was a letter from Opa to Mom. She took a deep breath. It was pretty nuts. It was talking about Oma as though she were still alive. It didn't have a date on it but I think it's possible it was more recent than that. You know how he was. She felt almost apologetic bringing up her grandfather's illness, even to her brothers.

Yeah, said Mike. Tom kept looking right at her.

So anyway, aside from all his crazy shit, there was some stuff about an NFT. I can't be totally sure, but it looks like he might have bought one. At the end of his life, when he was doing stupid things with all his money. There's an address in there, too, of the guy he might have bought it from. It's on Bond Street. Right over there.

Woah, said Mike.

Tom laughed. No fucking way that's real.

Edie ignored him, now looking at Mike. I want to go over there, she said. To check it out. I would go tomorrow but I know you guys are leaving early. Will you come with me?

Mike looked at his phone. I was supposed to meet someone later, he said. Tom grinned at this and threw a jab at Mike's shoulder, which he leaned away from in annoyance. But I haven't heard back from her yet, Mike said. I can come with you until she calls.

Great, Edie said. She looked back at Tom. He blew out a thick cloud of smoke, and then put out his cigarette against the table's cracked gray paint. You guys have fun with that, he said. I was getting ready to go home anyway.

A few minutes later, Edie and Mike were walking down President together, in the middle of the street. They headed West towards the canal, the sky opening up around them as their elevation decreased, and the dull warmth of the streetlamps on residential brick gave way to cool emptiness over the water. They passed abandoned warehouses covered in bright-colored graffiti,

images of aliens and cartoon characters peering out at them from among threatening-seeming messages left in a script they couldn't understand. They found a hole in a chain-link fence that blocked off the entrance to one and, curiosity getting the better of them, they pushed through it into the even blacker night of the unlit, condemned structure. They ran around in its belly and yard like little children, examining the construction materials left behind, porta-potties and steel drum barrels full of unseeable liquids and piles of cinderblocks.

They continued along Nevins until they reached the Carroll Street bridge, where they took a left over the canal. As she walked over it, Edie noticed that she could hardly smell the water, which throughout her childhood had always expressed a pungent tang of brackish rot to anyone within thirty feet of it. She looked around while she thought about this change to the canal, seeing the new residential highrises around it, unlikely mounds of glass and faux-brick, sore-seeming against the backdrop of defunct factories and empty lots covered in grass that, despite their obvious registers of decay, had come to hold for her an unlikely beauty. She and her brother walked among all of this until they reached the address she'd written down, 401 Bond Street, which was tucked up against a dead end that jutted out from the corner of Bond and Third.

At the end of Bond was a short barrier, meant to stop out-of-control cars, Edie supposed, and a chain-link fence, followed by the canal. They were standing at the point where it cuts west, breaking rank with the city's grid to wind unevenly until it reaches its outlet in the New York Harbor. Edie and Mike looked out through the fence at the black, hardly-moving water. Behind it stood massive, unmoving cranes and tractors, among mounds of what looked simply to be dirt, or garbage, and a constellation of squat rectangular structures around them that reached backwards into the night until the steel-plated Culver Line overpass, and then, beyond it, the always-humming BQE. They stood here for a while before turning back towards 401 Bond. Its front entrance actually



appeared to be on Third Street, a small steel door surrounded by glass panel walls that may as well have been sheets of obsidian, completely opaque and black. Edie saw herself reflected on their surfaces, shimmering uncertainly among the street lamps' fractured kernels of reflected light.

Around the corner, however, in the alley they had been standing in, there was another entrance, and after a moment of contemplating the building's smooth, quiet front they went back around it to give it a closer look. They passed signs of recent use—cigarette butts, empty beer bottles, a spilled styrofoam container of french fries and chicken wings hardly stripped of their flesh—as they walked up some kind of service ramp, which almost cleaved the building in two, creating a sort of internal alleyway as it rose slowly to a steel door on the building's second floor. This corridor was not directly lit by any streetlight or other external source, but the door it led to was surrounded by floor-to-ceiling windows, on each of the three floors, through which came streaming bright white light from within. As they walked up, Edie and Mike could see three identical hallways running away from the entrance. Edie tried the door, and with a gentle groan it swung forward, opening in.

They went in under the high fluorescent light, and they started to look around. The main hall was thin, with 25-foot ceilings, their unfinished mess illuminated in unforgiving detail by a series of large fluorescent lights, glowing bars hanging from two thin aluminum cords each from between the many anonymous pipes running around the ceilings. Fat flakes were peeling away everywhere—from among the high pipes, from the yellow walls—even seemingly up off the white floor itself, to join from below the piles of fallen paint and dirt accruing on the hallway floor. It extended straight ahead, through to the other end of the building, about half of a city block away, and was lined by rusting iron doors, each accompanied by a ventilation grate some half of a meter above it.

Edie and Mike walked up to one of these doors. Mike pushed it open, slowly against its weight, the rust in its hinges reverberating throughout the building. The light that came in over their heads illuminated a long, triangular section of the floor, showing the same white paint as the hall, and in the dark beyond it they could see dust shimmering in the broken shafts of light coming in through the grates above other doors further down. Around all of these patches of brightness was a thick, liquid dark.

The perfect silence of the empty building was shattered by Mike's phone starting to ring. He looked at it but didn't pick up, the white of its screen making his fake look grotesque, unreal. Hey, Edie, he said.

I know. Go ahead.

Well, I'm walking back towards the house a bit. You want to come with me?

I'm okay. I'm going to stay here for a while.

Mike paused to look at her for a while. Okay, he said. See you later.

Mike? As he turned away Edie called out his name. He stopped and looked back at her. Thanks for coming.

Sure, he said.

And so Edie walked around by herself for a while. She passed through halls of the same empty, crumbling rooms, each step releasing clouds of dust behind her that would come to hang like marine snow in the shafts of illumination appearing in the wake of doors she propped open, or those of the grilles which were not clogged with filth or dust above them. She walked up and down a stairwell that was so dark at its depths that she couldn't see the steps in front of or behind her, and she walked it by feel, the toes of her Chucks tracing the uneven shapes under her feet. She entered into a room on the top floor that was especially large, dark and empty; standing inside of

it, and comparing what she thought she was seeing with what she remembered of the building's dimensions from when she was outside, she didn't think that the room she was standing in should be possible: it seemed larger, much larger, than the space she could conceive of being available based on her mental picture of this third floor. It was in this room in particular that she imagined must be something she was seeking: a sign of her grandfather, perhaps, or of his mysterious young friend and his NFT. The room's sensation of unreality contributed to this faint hope she had of something so unlikely coming to happen. She began to explore. Though so far, she'd been enjoying the darkness of the structure's interior, mediated by what light sifted into its rooms and passageways from that central hall and from the dim streetlamps, outside, in here she felt the urge for the first time to turn on her flashlight, but when she reached for her phone, she found it dead. She kept walking. She stuck to the edges of the room, at first, keeping the wall to her left as she passed into the shadow. She found as she was looking around her that at the shadows' deepest parts, they'd reach a blackness so profound they were almost purple, or in some places, a very dark orange, like a blackened echo of the color of the streetlamps. She passed a window. It was shaded, as though covered in some kind of black lacquer, and only the faintest outlines of things outside could be seen through it: cars parked on Third Street, gleaming a little in the rain; buildings across the street, their windows all dark, discernible as simple negations of image; and the electric streetlamps, those ever-present bulbs that quietly light up the Brooklyn sky; now visible as dull ovoids, Edie could look directly into them and see the contours of the glass encasing their tungsten filaments.

Edie thought for a moment as she walked in the dark how nice it would be to have a companion of sorts, or a guide; a revenant of her grandfather, perhaps, grinning innocently in the dark; or the young man she knew only as Plush Masters. What a bizarre fucking name, she said

out loud. She heard a pop, like a drop of water from a pipe somewhere. She immediately froze. It occurred to her that whoever Plush was might not be so young anymore. She stayed completely still, and listened. Before the drop of water and the sound of her own voice, she had heard nothing in this building, other than her footsteps and her own breaths. Dust appeared as though it should make a sound when she disturbed it, billows spreading forth like slow-motion blooms of mushroom spores, caught in the building's strange lights: but it was always silent. She did not hear another such noise for the rest of the time she was in there. After a few more minutes of contemplating the confusingly large and dark room, Edie realized she was getting creeped out and, this sentiment finally overwhelming her curiosity, she decided it was time to go home. As she turned around, she found that she must have passed around a corner of some internal wall, or something like that, for she could no longer see the door through which she had come in. She found the window again, and traced the wall she had walked along into the room back the way she came. As she did, searching into the blackness before her for the light source that would indicate her exit, she saw once again the moving colors and shapes deep in the black, that must have been her eyes playing tricks of deprivation. She was momentarily blinded when she did find the hallway. As she went down the stairs, she saw that some kind of dirt or dust had collected on her hands in uneven smudges, probably from where she had been touching the walls, she thought. She rubbed her hands in the rain, hoping it would come off, as she walked her way home. It occurred to her after a few minutes that the letter in her pocket was probably getting damaged from the wet.