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Day Without a Name

A Case for Jakob Franck

Novel

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Ein Fall für Jakob Franck)

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VIII

An Invisible Companion

On the way to Marien Square, along Ludwigs-Street with its romantic and classical façades, Jakob Franck was surrounded by pedestrians, and he asked himself where they had come from; usually it was cars stuck in traffic on the one kilometre long, six-lane road, while on the pavement it was students hurrying to their class rooms or to the state library and tourists photographing the magnificent monarchist buildings at most. From Franck's experience, the stretch between the Feldherrnhalle and the Victory Gate wasn't really considered a promenade for strolling, except for when the parades in traditional costumes and other major cultural events took place.

After his conversation with the bike messenger, he had needed fresh air, but what he got were pungent wafts of perfume and aftershave, the smell of damp clothing and exhaust fumes. In the descending darkness, a drizzle had set in; even though it didn't start to rain in earnest, people exuded the sweaty tension of overly motivated joggers.

Franck couldn't find a niche, no exit; he drifted in the crowd, with people bumping into him, sullenly eyeing him; he was chasing his thoughts and would have preferred to be sitting in a bar, still and alone, even the over-crowded, noisy café in which he had spent his afternoon now seemed a better place for him to be by himself. He asked himself why he had left and where he wanted to go.

After he had paid the bill and left Jan Roland at the door, a sudden need for movement and absence overcame him, so strong that he ran off hastily and in a hectic rush and, before he realized what was happening, was taken prisoner by a feeling.

He pressed his shoulder bag to his chest as if afraid of being robbed, shoulders hunched, as if trying to avoid a beating. Franck was quite confused.

Not only did the bike messenger's statements and the way he had made them confuse him more and more with each step; what was more, he questioned his knowledge of human nature and his perception; he seemed to slowly lose control over his best ability: the deciphering of any given genome of lies.

When he had almost reached Odeon Square, he asked himself in all seriousness whether he had been fundamentally wrong about Ludwig Winther; whether it would actually be possible that Esther's former classmate was telling the truth; whether he, Chief Inspector Franck, and his colleagues had failed completely back then and had let themselves be chased away and diverted by the grieving parents instead of intensifying the interrogations in the school and the family's environment; whether Doris Winther hadn't committed suicide out of despair over her daughter's inconceivable death, but because she couldn't take the black silence any longer and broke down under the burden of shame.

Assuming, thought Franck, that he woke up at five in the morning in the middle of summer, and it was still dark out - how could he be sure that a solar eclipse wasn't happening?

He finally escaped the crowd. He turned onto Galerie Street and ducked under an archway and into the deserted grounds of the Hofgarten. The sound of gravel under his shoes; he stood still and listened; no sound, only the murmur of the traffic behind the arcades.

Just as he was about to walk on, toward the temple or just into the deeper darkness beyond the light from the shop windows behind him, the bells of St. Kajetan started ringing. They startled him; he couldn't remember the last time anything had startled him; he almost trembled; a shiver overcame him like it hadn't done since he was a child; his heart beating ahead of him; thoughts swirling in his head like talking snowflakes; a burning drummer sitting in his belly; the air he was breathing tasted more aromatic than fresh bread.

He folded his hands over the strap of his bag as if it was the most natural thing in the world, bowed his head and moved his lips as if in prayer; the ringing from the Theatriner Church echoed incessantly over the rooftops and the tree crowns. Franck didn't move for minutes. Then the silence returned.

When Franck looked around him in bewilderment - as if woken from an impenetrable dream -, he saw a boy of about ten, wearing a white anorak, the hood drawn deep over his

face, standing in the murky light by the arcades; the boy waved at him. Franck also lifted his arm; the next minute, the small, white figure with the bouncing bobble on his head darted through the archway, back onto the street.

With a ravenous desire for solitude, Franck made his way to the train station. He didn't turn on the lights in the hallway of his flat in Industrie Street; he lit the tall, white candle in the glass container in front of the balcony doors in his study, pulled down the window shades, put his bag onto the chair and only now did he, in front of the dimly lit coat rack, pull off his leather jacket and shoes. He took a bottle of beer from the fridge, opened it, returned to his study and closed the door; the room, lined with the velvety light of the inconspicuous flicker of the candle, welcomed him like a coat of silence.

Franck stood in the doorway for several minutes, taking a sip every now and again, and noticed how the deafening noise inside his head - the chatter and clatter in the café by the university, the clicking of heels, the roars of engines on Ludwigs-Street, the rumbling of the train and the bang of its closing doors, the ringing from Aubinger Church, feeble compared to the bells of St. Kajetan - slowly fell silent, until he only heard a buzz, the echo of his own presence.

He sat down at the desk, spread out the documents and notebooks in front of him, switched on the art deco lamp with the chrome-plated brass base - a gift from his wife on his fortieth -, rested his head on his hands and tried to get an idea of the case.

Like with any murder investigation, Franck began by studying the obvious; he assessed that which was provable beyond question or was based on valid findings at least. According to the parents' statements, Esther Winther left the house in Bernauer Street on the morning of Monday, February 14th, around a quarter past seven and made her way to her school in Schliersee Street, about two kilometres away. Nothing special had happened that morning, explained both Doris and Ludwig Winther to Chief Inspector Block the next day, after the husband had returned from his seminar in Salzburg. According to several students, the morning at school also passed without any remarkable events - except for the fact that Jan Roland got on everyone's nerves during recess with his theatre monologues that he had learned by heart, especially annoying the group around Sandra Horn and Esther Winther; the girls, however, were used to ignoring their classmate's showing off; Jan's ever same claim was that one day he would be a successful actor and they would all have to look up at him from their cheap seats.

After lessons finished around one-thirty, Esther told her friend Sandra that she had a few errands to run in the city and was going to meet a friend; whom she was referring to, she did not say, and Sandra didn't question her; she knew Esther's habit of »fabricating a secret« where supposedly there was none. Towards the end of the funeral, André Block and his colleagues questioned some of the young mourners, but the inspectors could not find out whom Esther was planning on meeting that afternoon.

Even though the medical examiner didn't rule out the possibility that a second person had helped Esther to tie the rope into a knot, the investigators didn't reconstruct the classmates' timelines. From what Franck had found out from Inspector Block, no further investigations were launched because the parents accepted their daughter's tragic decision and showed hardly any interest - if Franck understood the notes correctly - in the exact circumstances of her death, the more so as the criminal investigators didn't want to aggravate the situation with speculations.

From all fingers, the base of the thumbs, the wrists, the insides of the hands, microfibrils were taken by the investigators with the aid of tape, only to conclude that they matched the traces found on the rope. Traces of sweat and minuscule skin particles were compared to DNA-samples retained in the INPOL-system - without any results. Injuries on feet and elbows attested to the swinging motion of the body against the tree trunk in the moment of hanging and the officers and doctors were convinced that they were not signs of defensive struggles against a second person, a perpetrator. Haemorrhages in the eyes, traces of saliva, bleeding from the ears and other characteristics left no doubt that the student had killed herself and hadn't been murdered and hung afterwards in order to cover up the crime.

Unexplained traces on the rope as well as the noose, professionally tied fivefold - »like a hangman's knot«, the medical examiner found upon analysis of the abrasions on neck and nape -, could point towards a person who had knowledge of methods of asphyxiation. Where, Franck asked himself, should Esther have learned how to tie a noose in such a way that one could hang themselves with it?

Another question that occupied his mind while reading the papers was: were there any reasons as to why Esther had chosen specifically this way to end her own life? He knew young people who jumped off the roofs of skyscrapers or who - as Jan Roland had also remarked - threw themselves in front of a train, took pills and drugs or starved themselves until their organs failed.

Maybe, Franck thought, he should forget the question entirely or put it aside for now and turn his attention to the presently more pressing matter: Could the bike messenger Roland

be right in his allegations? Was it possible that Ludwig Winther had abused his daughter and nobody in his vicinity had noticed anything, not even Esther's best friend Sandra? Not even Esther's mother?

Was it possible that the mood swings her classmates reported were connected to her father's transgressions and possibly her mother's failure to help?

Was it possible that Doris and Ludwig Winther had kept their silence even after their daughter's death and lied shamelessly and convincingly to friends, relatives, neighbours and the police?

Everything was possible when it came to people; that much he knew after forty-two years of working with the police force.

Had Doris Winther been unable to breathe after a year underneath the iron mask and made an irrevocable decision, against her husband above all? Was that why she had left that terse message: *I'm leaving, I don't want to see you anymore.*

Everything, Franck thought, everything was possible.

He had to take care of the spoon.

Of course he hadn't had a re-sealable plastic bag on him, so he had wrapped the small spoon in a paper tissue and placed it as carefully as possible in his bag; Jan Roland had gone to use the restroom, the waitress had had her hands full, and plates and coffee cups had been piling up on the table next to him; Franck had taken a dirty spoon and placed it in front of Roland's cup from where he had taken the other - mere precaution, just in case the bike messenger, for whatever reason, should suddenly miss his spoon; the waitress had noticed nothing.

To Franck, even a seemingly far-fetched trail was a trail that had to be followed; he would ask his friend Block to compare the fingerprints and other possibly surviving genetic traces off the spoon to those taken from the plastic bag that had been found near Esther's body as well as to the other evidence saved from rope and body without any big, official fuss.

Besides that, Franck still didn't know what to think of Jan Roland's assertions. In his opinion, the man was a frustrated wannabe; on the other hand, Roland had no reason to spread such lies, and Franck didn't think him so cunning or ruined that he would start a belated revenge campaign.

Maybe Ludwig Winther had talked badly about Jan in Esther's presence, maybe the student with his theatrical behaviour had become pushy and Esther had, not least because of her father's urging, turned away from him. Nobody had investigated the seventeen-year-old student's relationship network; there were no notes on preferences, habits, disputes, childhood

friendships in the files. From the entries, comments and reports on the superficial-sounding statements taken from the teenagers, Franck read the biography of a girl whose grades were consistently good, who go noticed for her occasional mood swings, an aspect in which she hardly differed from most other classmates the same age, and who had only started to appear glum and unapproachable recently, the reasons for which remained in the dark. Her friends hadn't been worried about her; the fact that she was prone to being a loner was more interesting that unusual to her classmates, and since she was considered a reliable friend who was open to playing pranks on teachers, she had enjoyed a lot of sympathies for many years.

Esther had been suggested as class representative a few times, but had refused every time; in the school pictures - one of which was in Franck's files - that were presented to the officers around André Block, Esther always stood on the far left in the back row, towering above the ones in front of her as one of the tallest; she seemed to like it; her lips formed a mischievous smile; even though the girl next to her touched her shoulder, Esther remained - Franck surmised - at a distance and darted - or so he imagined - out of the frame the next moment.

The photo that he looked at in the light of the antique lamp held as much mystery as the bike messenger's statements and the police records. Esther Winther, Franck thought, had belonged to nobody; she had cast a shadow for seventeen years, and nobody had noticed how the shadow took control of the girl and finally forced her to commit a murder for which she regarded no other person worthier than herself. Whomever she had accused with her actions, he remained free until this day - unpunished, unrecognized, guilty.

No, Franck thought, the truth had another, a hidden face.

On that cloudy, forbidding, lightless February afternoon, Esther Winther had not been alone in the park near Balan Street; someone else had accompanied her for hours, from the school close to the Giesinger train station as far as the city centre, in the tram, on the underground. Unnoticed, surrounded by hundreds of pedestrians, of which only a fraction may have been blind, visually impaired or deaf, she would have walked through the streets and the shops, may possibly have been asked for directions by a stranger and would have answered politely; whomever she had met, whatever she might have seen, heard or thought, none of that had had any influence on her deadly desire.

Someone, Franck thought, had been close to her the whole time, hadn't left her side, had encouraged her in everything and finally accompanied her on her way back, up the city hill, to the underground- and tram station from where it wasn't far to her house; where she was

at home and knew every metre, every shortcut, every secluded corner for important kisses, every café, every silence if elsewhere was too loud.

It was impossible for her to have been alone - Franck had gotten up from the desk and walked around the room, startling the flame inside the glass container; this area wasn't outside the populated world, the park not in a hidden corner of the Aubinger Lohe; lights were on in the houses all around, cars lighting up the edges, cyclists on their evening errands, dog owners walking their animals, and not only around seven p.m. The animals needed exercise between six and six-thirty as well, had to shit or mark their territory; hundreds and hundreds of the inhabitants of two adjoining burroughs delegated their forlornness to their four-legged companions that barked in alarm day and night, even when all they detected was the scent of a ferocious porcupine in Newfoundland.

Frieda didn't bark at all, Linda Schelling had said to one of the policemen who reached the crime scene first. The dachshund was lost for words, Franck thought, and its owner should have delayed the gossip session with her best friend until later, because then she would have been there on time and would have done life a service. I'd been talking to my best friend, Linda Schelling had stated, and then I walked along Pfälzer Street suspecting nothing, and cut the corner onto Bad Dürkheimer, and Frieda ran ahead into the park like always, and I along behind her, and then I see a shape in the tree and think to myself: who hung the doll up there, and when I got closer, I saw that it wasn't a doll, it was a person, that's Esther from next-door, I thought to myself and I couldn't believe my eyes and Frieda was standing there and didn't make a sound, and she's not usually like that.

That's right, Franck thought, and felt the need for a cigarette and a drink, that's not what life is usually like; life is usually different before the criminal investigation team arrives.

Still, he didn't want to open the door, didn't want to leave the room; his got gaze caught by the class picture, the open, unconventional face on the far left in the last row. He looked at the papers, notes, reports and folders scattered around the table and asked himself whether he had kept all of this because he had sensed that the dead women of Ramersdorf would one day return to him - like Vera Balan, who threw herself in front of a train and was named like the street that Esther had crossed in order to die; like Paulus Landwehr, who stabbed himself after he had smashed his wife's head in; like all the other visitors that take their seats naturally, drink his liquor, eat his biscuits and stare at him as if they were still unborn and longed for his breath.

Nobody else was here, Linda Schelling had said to the police officers and repeated this statement later to André Block, she had been all alone in the park, she said, believe me, there was nobody else, just me and Frieda.

»And Esther,« Franck said to the photocopy of the records. »Esther was there, directly in front of you, you looked at her as she was hanging there, twenty centimetres off the ground, in her cowboy boots and jeans; and how much pride rang in your voice as you showed the grey cell phone that you had only bought the week before to the policeman; nobody in your group of friends had had a mobile phone until then, the plague of these gimmicks had only begun to spread back then; and you made your statement: How lucky that I already have a mobile phone, because I could call immediately and report the accident.« That's the word Franck circled in blue ink. Accident. How lucky.

»How goddamn lucky,« Franck said and swept all the files off the table with a movement of his arm; the pages scattered around the wooden floor in a mess. Franck looked at it as if he couldn't believe what he had just done. But the view soothed him, he saw the hectic flicker of the flame decrease until it cast its light steadily and upright once more upon the whole room that lay as silent as it had done when he had walked in and closed the door. How much time had passed since then, he didn't know; he thought it possible that he had spent the whole night with the dead women and should set out to see new, unheard witnesses soon.

Franck knew for certain that in the midst of the destroyed order - he switched off the desk lamp and walked toward the candle in front of the balcony doors -, the truth forms the center, like on the scene of a violent crime, where nothing is right and nothing fits together, and yet a fossil that connects the past to the present and points towards the future, to the resolution of the case, hides itself.

To find that fossil - that had been his task on the force all his life. Even if a lot of time had passed since the deaths of Esther and Doris Winther, more than eighty seasons, and the scars of the crime scenes had turned into dust and dirt and brittle ruins, living earth, fresh green and vibrant foliage, he would find that fossil and decipher it.

This Franck swore to the two silent women and blew out the candle; he stood by the window and closed his eyes. Darkness flowed into him.

When he opened his eyes, how should he recognize a solar eclipse?

And then he knew: by the absolute silence of the birds.

IX

Tell Me That It's Not True

2

At first, he had almost pushed her away and let her know that he found her behaviour inappropriate; what arrogance, he thought immediately and accepted the woman's touch like a lost greeting, an awkward plea for companionship. After a while, he wondered how it had come to this in the first place, but didn't realize that an hour had passed already.

An hour in which he had leant against the wall of the corridor, next to the oval mirror and heard the woman's faint whimpering against his neck, had smelled the scent of freshly baked apple pie. As if it was the most natural thing in the world, his hands rested on the stranger's back, she was much shorter than him and wearing an apron with floral print; and the sentence he had said had faded away as if it had been meaningless, or a lie.

»I have to tell you that your daughter is dead.«

Franck hadn't said that sentence for the first time.

With that same sequence of words, the same measured tone of voice, without hesitation and a demeanour that allowed for closeness, he delivered horrible messages regularly; he withstood the tears, the glances fleeing from the eyes ablaze in a panic, the imploding voices, the apocalypse, and, a lot of the time, the scream of the one relative who was torn from the protection of his life's womb and into the garish death in which he had to exist from now on and who realized, in the blink of an eye, that there was no return.

Franck drew on these experiences the next time, and sometimes he received - weeks, months later - a letter of gratitude, or a parcel with sweets, coffee and cognac and a card on which they wrote that he had acted »completely unlike a policeman«. That's when he commemorated, amidst his daily routine, for a few seconds, the voluntarily or involuntarily deceased whose file number he already couldn't remember.

In Doris Winther's flat, he had felt like a rookie in the beginning, one who didn't know where to place his hands, his thoughts and the sentences he had brought along. Strangely, he hadn't felt like she was intrusive, he had been surprised by his natural reaction and the easy manner in which he put his arms around her, pressed his hands onto her apron and took a step back, as if he wanted to create an atmosphere as relaxed as possible, and leant against the wall.

In the first minutes, it had seemed to him that both of them gave into the unexpected closeness, relieved that none said a word; Franck had noticed the silence; no radio was playing, no television; no sound penetrated from the outside. When Franck had gotten out of

the car earlier, a dog had started barking somewhere nearby and soon after a second had joined in, and the barking, he remembered, had still been there when he rang the door bell and the woman in the apron opened the door.

Then he had noticed her voice; a whimper - just underneath his chin; he had felt her lips on his neck -, that got louder and louder and turned into a wail whose steady intensity, carried by a warm, singing tone, had surprised him. He had thought about what he was supposed to do feverishly; he hadn't done anything, he had stood there, kept his hands calm, and concentrated on the frail voice, so that he wouldn't miss a word, a syllable, a letter.

Never before had he stood like this, immediately after delivering a message of death. Never before had the understandable speechlessness of a relative turned him into the silent witness that he wasn't allowed to be; they had been alone; he hadn't found out the whereabouts of the husband; nobody except for Esther and her parents lived in the house in Bernauer Street, he had gotten that information from the computer in the station; the couple had no other children; the wife had baked an apple pie that would cool off over night and be especially tasty the next day; maybe Esther had been supposed to take a piece of it to school with her.

The reason as to why Franck had asked himself whom Doris Winther was expecting when the door bell had suddenly rung remained a mystery to him; Esther had a key, it had been in her pocket, as a colleague had told him. And Ludwig Winther? Why should he ring the bell instead of just unlocking the door? Pointless questions had wandered around Franck's head like ghosts, and he had been about to pose one or the other, just to be rid of them.

»Tell me that it's not true.«

He hadn't been listening.

He understood every single word, but hadn't listened adequately; his thoughts had wandered, so that he had had to clear his throat before he'd been able to get out the words. When he had started to reply, Doris Winther had shaken her head and emitted a hiss, embedded into her feverish whimper; Franck had hesitated and remained silent. He had wondered if he shouldn't say the sentence anyway: Would you like me to call a relative? Or: Tell me about your daughter. Instead, she had nuzzled her head even closer to his neck; it had seemed to him as if her wail entered his bloodstream and floated through his body. It's not right to keep silent, he had told himself, he shouldn't act this way, and he had never done so before.

What was happening to this woman, was she having a nervous breakdown, was she about to faint and held on to him because of that? Shouldn't he have called a doctor by now?

What reaction was she expecting from him? She had requested the truth, and naturally meant another than his.

Or was he judging the situation all wrong? Impossible to let the woman go now, that had become clear to him, she had demanded his closeness and he had reacted too late; he had never experienced anything comparable; he had let himself, he was stunned to realize, be caught out, he hadn't been in control of his senses and still wasn't.

Every now and again, she had sobbed quietly. He had held her. Wrong, he had thought, what he was doing wasn't anything but an embrace; no more official distance, intimacy beyond all authority and possible explanation.

When he had managed - without moving his head - to look at his watch for the first time, almost two hours had passed. That seemed inconceivable, and he had risked a second glance. Something isn't right, he had thought, something was slipping away from him, something irretrievable; something wouldn't be quite the same as it had before; something that concerned only him alone and of which he wouldn't be able to tell anyone.

His life as a policeman had taken a turn against which he was powerless.

His life as a man and husband had lost its familiar meaning. He had begun to suspect why so many years ago - and this had irritated him so much that he had to control his breathing so that nothing of his inner shock would be conferred upon the woman - he had taken over this task of all tasks, the one that all the other colleagues, men and women, shied away from despite their experience, education and psychological training.

Nobody had forced him to; he hadn't had a single conversation with his superior about the subject and the responsibility that he had assumed vicariously for the whole department.

After the murder of a man, in which he had been leading the investigation, he had driven to the deceased's fiancée in the middle of the night and delivered the message to her. She had had two girlfriends over with whom she was discussing the impending nuptials; they had been drinking wine and their mood couldn't have been more exuberant; Franck had been able to hear their laughter even from outside the front door. Then the young woman was standing before him - twenty eight years old, long, blonde hair, a shadowless face with blue, blazing eyes, her cheeks reddened by wine and joyful anticipation - and he had said to her: My name is Jakob Franck, I'm with the crime investigation team; I have to deliver a very sad message. She had looked at him - and as if the two women in the living room had overheard them, the conversation stopped suddenly, as did the music -, and he had added: May I come in so we can have a seat? The young woman - she was, Franck knew, a dental assistant - hadn't stopped

staring at him. She had stood in front of him, motionless, with parted lips; all the blue had disappeared from her eyes and she looked as though she was wilting. The girlfriends had appeared behind the woman, just as young as their hostess, one of them also blonde, the other brunette, they had taken each other by the hand and not dared to come another step closer, waiting for a word from the inspector with lost glances.

Your fiancé, Franck said, was robbed in a jeweler's store and shot by one of the burglars, he died while the paramedics were working on him.

Nobody had reacted. Steps had been audible from the flat next-door, a shuffle, a clicking sound. Franck had said: My condolences, also in the name of my colleagues. Should we all have a seat at the table?

They had then sat down at a table scattered with magazines, brochures, catalogues and photos, with the glasses, the wine- and water bottles; Franck had sat down on a chair, the three women on the sofa across from him, the fiancée - her name was Anja Ring - in the middle, her hands pressed between her knees, looking at the cabinet with the framed pictures. The only thing she had said up to this point was: Come on in. She had barely had enough strength for even that sentence; one of her girlfriends had linked arms with her and lead her back into the room.

Then she had jumped up, pulling the colourfully embroidered tablecloth towards herself; glasses, bottles, paper had toppled onto the carpet; with a movement simultaneously instinctive and practiced in countless training units, Franck had turned so that no liquid landed on his clothing and stood up slowly. Anja had waved the tablecloth over her head and was running up and down the room, screaming, from the television set to the door, from the window to the wall; her voice shrill and terrifying; the women on the couch hadn't known what to do; Franck had dodged the frantic woman and not let her out of his sight for even one second.

Until she had stopped and fallen silent abruptly; a hoarse pant escaping her throat, her body trembling, the scrap of cloth fluttering in her ceaselessly twitching right hand; again, just as she had done by the door, she had stared at the inspector with colourless, tear stained eyes. One of the two women had gotten up from the sofa aimlessly, the other had sat with tears streaming down her face. With an awkward, rash movement, Anja had thrown the tablecloth over her head and collapsed in a heap; she had huddled against the wall, pulled her legs close to her body, tipped onto her side and not moved again.

Franck had kneeled down next to her, taken her hand and said: I will stay with you for as long as you'd like.

Around midnight, after Anja's parents and her fiancé's father had arrived, he had left the apartment. After the funeral at the West Cemetery, he had sat next to Anja Ring in the restaurant, and she had thanked him repeatedly for his presence during that night, for his words and his patience.

It was *him*, Franck had thought suddenly in that night between February fourteenth and February fifteenth and was startled when he looked at the watch for a third time - it was *him* who sought out the closeness, the solace, the silence, the devotion and the patience; it wasn't selflessness and the knowledge of the necessity of benevolence in the darkest hours, that wasn't written down in any rulebook on the laws of police tasks, that determined his actions, or they did so only in part. First and foremost, he saw himself reflected in the people whom he had to visit as part of his job; they opened their doors to him and he didn't just enter *their* universe of forlornness, but returned home into his own. In the rooms and corridors of those who were no longer relatives but the bereaved, he was able to find his way much more easily than in his own life, in togetherness, in his marriage, his household.

In that night, embraced and held by Doris Winther, he hadn't wanted to be - and his suspicion had turned into certainty - anywhere else; he had been at his rightful place. Even though this day no longer had a name, because death always took the names of such days away with him, time kept on existing, and he would use it in order to do what he was meant to do; he wouldn't run away, wouldn't make excuses, or hide behind his function and his dutiful behaviour, he wouldn't lie or make any promises.

Yes, he thought, that's what he would be from now on, him alone.

Three years after Doris Winther's funeral and the seven-hour long embrace, about which he had never told anyone, his marriage to Marion broke down for good and he never entered into another committed relationship.

»Tell me that it's not true.«

And he had said: »You return man to dust and say, ›Return, O children of man!‹ For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night.«

That's when she had stopped whimpering and touched his neck with her lips; he shouldn't have noticed it.

At Esther's funeral, she had asked the priest to repeat the psalm.