

— March 20, 1905. Schumacher House, 6:30 P.M. —

Irma Altergott was a 23-year-old housemaid working for the Schumacher family. She had been working for them ever since she was 16. She tended to most things around the house, whether it be folding laundry, cooking meals, cleaning the house and washing dishes. She was a young woman with brown hair in a long, single braid cascading down her back. She was always seen around the house in her maid uniform, a simple, black and white dress, and an apron over it. Irma began working for the Schumacher family around 1899.

She was in the middle of vigorously scrubbing the countertop after making dinner. She made sauerbraten, a beef roast, along with red cabbage and potato dumplings. She had been in a trance of scrubbing vigorously for 20 seconds straight, then moving the rag to check. If even a speck of sauce remained, she would go right back to her regimen. At the dinner table nearby, Johanna Schumacher had her nose in a newspaper. Johanna had blonde hair with blue eyes and wore a white dress and a purple shawl. Her husband Vergil was a few years older than her as Johanna was only in her mid-thirties. The only sound breaking through the silence was the ticks of the grandfather clock that rang out from the living room.

“Ugh, this fool.” Johanna complained, breaking the silence.

“Pardon?” Irma questioned as she paused her cleaning fit.

“Kaiser Wilhelm. I swear, that fool is going to get us all killed one day.”

“My apologies, but I’m not well-versed in that kind of stuff.” Irma modestly admitted. Johanna chuckled and picked her newspaper back up.

“Of course you’re not.” Johanna spat to herself. The two remained in silence for the next few minutes before Vergil came inside with Aigis and Frieda. Frieda still looked like a wet dog. Neither Johanna or Irma looked in their direction. Vergil turned around to the two young girls

and put a finger up to his mouth. He tiptoed over to Irma, still preoccupied with her cleaning. He took his left hand, wound it up, and began to bring it to her lower back. Irma looked behind her from the corner of her eye before she shot around, back to the counter. Vergil immediately put his hands behind his back.

“Herr Schumacher!” Irma shouted. “Not in front of the little ones!”

“What’d I do?” Vergil smirked. Johanna groaned. She could see the slight gap in his two front teeth with the way he cheesed.

“You pig.” Johanna snorted derisively toward her husband. Irma turned her head to hide the smirk forming on her face. Johanna slapped her newspaper on the table and went over to Aigis. She bent down and gave the five-year-old a warm embrace.

“Hello, mama.” Aigis said. Johanna broke the hug. She looked over to Frieda. The warmth on her face faded away, and her lips turned into a scowl. Frieda opened her arms and walked over to Johanna to give her a hug, but she stopped the young girl with an upright palm. Irma, on the other hand, wove past Vergil and sprinted towards Frieda.

“Oh, you poor thing! What happened?” She cooed. She held onto the four-year-old. Some freshwater dripping from Frieda’s clothes stained her white apron, but she didn’t care.

“I fell in a river!” Frieda shouted with unfiltered joy, unbothered by her near-death experience. Johanna noticed something about Frieda’s teeth. The top two front row teeth had a gap between them. For some reason, she couldn’t stop looking at it. She brushed off all the thoughts in her head. Frieda’s only four. Children usually are still teething at that age.

“Irma, could you dry Frieda off upstairs?” Vergil requested.

“Of course, mein herr.” Irma nodded gracefully. She held Frieda’s tiny wet hand as she led her upstairs. Aigis, not wanting to be left alone, followed them. Vergil and Johanna were now the only two left in the kitchen. He sat down in the dining room chair across from his wife.

“Johanna, it’s time.” He blurted out in a serious tone.

“Time?”

“Aigis said that she somehow pushed Frieda into the river and saved her from hitting the ground. She’s ready.”

Johanna’s eyes widened a smidge. “Already?”

“She IS special, after all.”

“You’re right about that. How could such a special girl come from a dirtbag like you?”

Johanna sarcastically jabbed. Vergil laughed loudly and slammed the wooden table. But he slammed it with such force that it felt fake and exaggerated.

“You’re funny, you know that?” Vergil smiled with a tiny bit of venom laced in his words. Johanna looked back at him, deadpan, and without saying a word. The only thing she did was stare. He coughed awkwardly, trying to break the tension.

“And they say love is dead these days.” Johanna joked, mostly to herself.

“So who’s going to tell her?” Vergil asked.

“I will.” She curtly bit back. “I don’t trust you with breaking delicate news to small children.”

“That’s fine. I’m more of a trainer than I am a teacher.”

Johanna stood up and walked off. But before she left the kitchen, she turned back to Vergil.

“Where’s the picture book?”

“In the study, first bookcase, second shelf from the top. It has a pink hardback cover with a golden trim. Can't miss it.”

She left promptly and didn't say another word. Vergil leaned back so his voice could carry through the open doorway.

“Have you ever tried living life without that sour look on your face?! You actually look a lot prettier when you're not being pissy!”

No voice. Just the sound of mahogany stairs being smashed and splintered by black dress shoes.