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The Assassin

Not long after his sixteenth birthday Albrecht decided to devote his life solely and exclusively to the task of freeing the state from the clutches of a future tyrant. His reasoning? The events of the recent past, which he'd learnt about at school as well as in films and books, seemed too monstrous to imagine; yet at the same time he felt certain that the general human debacle was far from over and that a renewed outbreak of atrocities was probable, if not inevitable, in the short to medium term.

Albrecht would be ready for it; he was preparing to step in. He knew it would be relatively simple: in the past the attempt to combat tyranny had suffered from a certain feebleness of will, not to mention a marked antipathy towards dying; which was why it had ultimately failed. But, thought Albrecht, these were things you could easily train for, especially in the case of dying, since that was up to no one but yourself. Providing, he told himself, there can be no doubt that eliminating the tyrant is the only viable option, and assuming the thought of your own survival has been banished from your mind; then it would all come down to turning intention into action, and that—thought Albrecht—would be easy to arrange.

From that moment onwards he started monitoring the political and social situation, preparing to step in. To his great good fortune he was soon to learn the most important lesson of them all, for during his school-days an underground terrorist organization carried out a string of political murders. One by one its members were identified and seized. From this he realized how little it would serve his cause if he were to live his life in hiding or even on the run. It would, he reflected, be infinitely more useful for him to lead an irreproachably blameless and open existence, earning the respect of those around him; so he could leap into action and profit from their trust.

And so on leaving school he joined a trainee programme at a bank and passed with flying colours, before studying law at university and returning to the workplace as a leading legal expert in international monetary affairs. Within a few years he was offered an influential position at head office, where he cultivated his relationship with his colleagues, including—and in fact most specifically—those whom he held under the greatest suspicion of clearing the way for the coming of a tyrant. He took note of

their speech and gestures, going so far as to borrow them himself; he wanted to perfect his cover, in case he ever needed it.

As luck would have it, during his student-days he had made the acquaintance of a number of keen huntsmen, and after joining them at the hunt on more than one occasion he showed such an unmistakable and yet unobtrusive interest in the sport that in no time there was a general clamour for him to undergo the proper training and exams. He consented, and so became adept at handling light and heavy weaponry, without arousing the slightest of suspicions.

It was during his initiation as a fully-fledged hunter that he first became acquainted with a fellow huntsman's sister. A relationship developed. At first Albrecht was uncertain as to whether intimate contact with another human being might not endanger his mission: after all, his true identity must be hidden at all times. But after careful consideration he decided that a good marriage and a young family would be of definite advantage and that the risks could safely be ignored.

Before reaching his fortieth birthday Albrecht had achieved his goal. His position was secured against all possible dangers, he had a foothold on the political scene, and his weapons were on standby. All he had to do was wait. And then, after a relatively long period of peace, the big crisis came, just as he'd foreseen it would. Political systems started to collapse, entire populations were on the move, and wars broke out; at first far from home, then drawing ever closer. Questions that people believed had long since been answered were all of a sudden entirely unresolved. The economy was stagnant; no one knew what to do.

From then on Albrecht took note of every detail. His main interest was in the chief culprit, the tyrant himself, for that was in the nature of his mission. But there was much to be learnt from the fluctuating opinions of even the lowliest of officials, not to mention new appointments to the junior ranks, emerging precedents within the courts of law and the slightest of shifts in the official party-line. And it was during this period of watching that Albrecht's position and routine paid off; for he had long been seeing developments from the inside, and it was part of his job to see past the contradictions and draw the right conclusion.

Perhaps it was his prudence that made him unable to take action, for although the signs of impending tyranny were multiplying, Albrecht never felt the time had

come. The situation in his immediate vicinity was deteriorating rapidly, there were cases of corruption and coercion at the most senior of levels and hatred for the political leadership had reached an all-time high; yet Albrecht still had reservations.

A trump card, that's what I am, he told himself, as he went to work each morning; and how many trump cards are there in a game? A man like Albrecht could only be sure of himself. And if he dealt himself out at the wrong time (which is to say, too early), then everything—his prudence, his waiting—would all have been in vain. He'd even have to fear that things could get much worse, perhaps prompted in the first place by his doomed and futile deed.

And so he decided to lie low for a while. He waited. And as the situation showed no signs of improving and continued inexorably to decline, he came to realize with increasingly certainty that his decision to do nothing had been in every sense affirmed.

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