

Chapter Fourteen

Posy launched her body at the bed, flew through the air like Superman, and skidded on the teflon bedspread.

‘Whee-hee!’

Alexander threw himself onto the bed next to her, which made it shake violently. He turned to Posy and his upper arm reached over her body in an easy embrace. She beamed up at him.

‘You’ve given yourself a rash,’ he commented, smoothing his finger delicately over the reddening skin beneath her necklace.

‘This bedspread is really rough,’ Posy grumbled. ‘Yes, I’ve got a skid mark.’

Alexander gently pulled the necklace fastener round to the front and undid it. He removed the necklace and put it on the bedside table, then kissed Posy’s collarbone.

‘I’d like to take you off to a gorgeous remote cottage somewhere, with an eiderdown duvet and white cotton sheets, and the bed would be so soft that you’d never want to get out of it.’

He gave Posy a lingering kiss.

‘Are you happy now?’

‘Yes!’ she replied. ‘I’m so happy I could squeak.’

‘We’ve had enough of that from Tansy’s oboe, thank you. Do you squeak if you’re squeezed?’

He lowered his hand to her waist. It was hardly a squeeze, more a gentle pressure, a caress.

His hand smoothed over her hipbone as if assessing its worth.

‘Oh god, you’re lovely,’ he whispered, and his hand rose, past her waist, upwards, until his thumb was brushing her breast. Posy felt her body respond with an unfamiliar, sexual pang.

She pushed her ribcage upwards to welcome more of him, and Alexander kissed her again, rolling on top of her with his knee falling as if by accident between hers. Posy realised how

her body needed this. To be worshiped by a man. To be stroked, enjoyed, to have her

physicality acknowledged as much as her musicianship, her brain, her organisational skills.

All of those things seemed superficial and false. First and foremost, I am a body, thought

Posy; a living thing, a female. Alexander let his hand explore inside the cotton jersey fabric

of her top, so he was now touching her naked skin. Posy felt the hairs stand up on her arms,

which she lifted luxuriantly above her head, letting them rest on the pillow. Alexander’s other

hand plunged into the top and he lifted it above her bra.

There was a knock on the door. Posy and Alexander froze and locked eyes.

‘Shh. Don’t go,’ he whispered.

Posy shook her head anxiously, but strained her ears to listen.

‘Allo?’ came a voice.

‘It’s Leif,’ said Posy.

Alexander frowned. ‘What does he want?’

‘Maybe he needs to check something about the concert,’ said Posy.

‘Posee, are you there? Posee?’

‘It sounds important,’ she said.

‘It can’t be,’ said Alexander. ‘Ignore him!’

‘Posee!’ the knocking continued.

Posy sat up, adjusting her clothes.

‘Sorry,’ she cringed. Alexander moved over a little to allow her to straighten herself.

‘Get up, then,’ Posy hissed, ‘I’ll have to open the door.’

To her dismay, she saw the hurt in his eyes.

‘I’m sorry.’

‘Does it matter if he knows?’ Alexander asked.

Posy looked at the door. She needed to answer it. And the conversation seemed to be leading to a part of her brain that was unwilling to be explored. Did it matter?

‘I don’t know,’ she said, feeling very unhelpful. He sat up and moved away from the bed, to the little round table, tucking in his shirt which had pulled itself out of his trousers.

Posy felt distressed at her own confusion. Was she simply guarding her privacy in a sensible way, or was this something to do with Barnaby, with her unwillingness to get involved in a new relationship?

Leif knocked again.

‘Coming!’

She opened the door.

‘Hi, Leif, sorry, I was just in the loo! What can I do for you?’

He looked puzzled, as if he had forgotten.

‘I hope I’m not interrupting you,’ said Leif, his eyes scanning the room and checking out the figure of Alexander, standing awkwardly at the table.

‘It’s just, I wanted to say how great it was this morning. And, you know, are you happy with our contributions?’

‘Oh, yes, I’m just amazed! I feel totally confident now. There’s no question that the Saturday concert will be absolutely fine. We’ve two big pieces to play, the Beethoven and the joint

composition, which is going really well, and then there'll be some chamber stuff from a few of the players... yes, I'm not at all worried. And the schools have contacted me to confirm that they're coming to hear us. I'm sure we'll get the bookings we need.'

'You see, we are all adult beginners. So there is nothing dishonest about us joining you.'

"Nothing at all. I'm sorry I was so slow to realise that."

He stood there awkwardly, then brushed his hair back from his forehead. Posy was beginning to wonder if this was more a nervous gesture than one of vanity.

'It's our first rehearsal for Godfrey's piece this afternoon,' he smiled.

'Ah,' responded Posy.

'Yeah,' said Leif, laughing lightly. There was a pause.

'Well,' said Posy helplessly, 'I hope it goes well.'

Suddenly she felt selfish – her problems had been solved; Leif's were only just beginning.

There had been no sign of Godfrey Maxwell Minniver all morning; if he were ready for the afternoon rehearsal, it would be a miracle.

'We haven't even seen the parts,' Leif confided.

'Well then, there's nothing you could have done,' Posy suggested.

'Si,' Leif responded. 'actually it will be okay. Godfrey's PA is coming down, in fact she'll be here soon. So if we have any technical difficulties, you know, if any parts are missing, she'll be able to help.'

'Yes, of course.'

'Okay. Bye, then.'

Posy closed the door gently, thinking how much this blond Euro-God had been humbled by the crazy-making of one of an ageing British composer. He seemed so bereft; was he expecting more help, more sympathy? What did he want from her? Posy had a strange feeling that she had not supplied what Leif needed.

'Do you think we ought to try and help?' she asked Alexander.

'Well, yes,' he said, 'but I don't see how. We've no idea what Godfrey's piece entails. One minute it was a percussion concerto, then it was electro-acoustic, then quarter-tones with a new system of notation... God knows what he's going to stick in front of them.'

'I suppose I could offer to act as an interpreter,' murmured Posy.

'Well he doesn't really need one, does he?'

'No, but I'd be there for moral support. I'll go and ask him. Right away.'

She left the room swiftly, leaving Alexander standing at the cold little table.

Leif seemed delighted to accept Posy's offer. He insisted that a translator was, in fact, an extremely good idea - although he spoke English fluently, he wasn't entirely confident that he'd understand the terminology embedded in an English avant-garde music score. So Posy found herself striding happily along to the Great Hall at two o'clock, to join the elite Parisian ensemble, L'OEIL.

When she arrived, the orchestra were tuning up and looking a little tense, yet relieved that finally their work on the new Maxwell-Minniver masterpiece was beginning. At one end of the room, a woman was manoeuvring a screen so that it faced the players. She had a laptop computer balanced on a nearby chair, and was deftly pressing buttons. A brightly coloured image shot up onto the blank screen, red and orange flames with medieval-style monsters writhing as if in Hell. At the centre of the image, large blue letters proclaiming:

GODFREY MAXWELL-MINNIVER

THROUGH THE INFERNO AND BEYOND:

A composer's journey towards self-discovery

Posy thought she could discern a few ironic comments from the players, and strained her ears to try to understand better: sadly it was impossible, they spoke too quickly, though she knew that 'merde' meant *shit*. Suddenly the woman approached her.

'Hi, have you come to see to the air conditioning? I just had to complain because it's so stuffy in here and the windows seem to be jammed.'

Posy realised that her slightly awkward presence was an invitation for misunderstanding: she obviously wasn't a member of the orchestra, so who else could she be but some sort of hotel assistant?

'Er, no, I'm nothing to do with the hotel. I'm a player from the other orchestra, the Millfields Adult Beginners. I'm here as a translator, if there's any terminology in the score that Leif isn't familiar with.'

'Oh, my French is perfectly good,' said the woman. 'I'm not just Godfrey's PA, I work for the French division of his publishers, Longman and Fortune. It's through me that this

connection came about.'

'Oh. Fair enough,' said Posy. 'Well if I'm not needed...'

'*Ah non*, stay,' said Leif rushing up. 'I'd like her to stay,' he said to the woman. 'Posy is an expert in avant garde techniques, and she's here to act as a consultant.'

'Oh, fine,' said the woman, 'There are one or two radical things in the score!' She laughed conspiratorially, and Posy saw Leif's face fall.

'*Pardon*,' continued Leif, 'Posy, this is Godfrey's PA, Imogen Makepeace.'

'Pleased to meet you,' Posy replied, 'I'm Posy Gibson, I run the Millfields Adult Beginners Orchestra.'

'Oh how marvellous,' replied Imogen, her voice still rather flat.

'Well I'll just go and sit over there...if you need me...'

'Fine. I want to start with the film. Leif, this is really important. It will give the players an in depth view of Godfrey's aesthetic, where he is now. Because some of your musicians might only know of his operas and the Inferno cycle. He's really changed since then.'

Leif pushed his blond hair back from his forehead.

'Ah, okay,' he said, glancing at his watch. 'But we only have up to five o'clock. After that the players will walk out.'

'It'll be time well spent,' Imogen stressed, brushing aside his concerns. 'It's all set up. Let's start.'

Posy watched quietly as this self-possessed young woman walked in front of the orchestra and began addressing them in French. From her own experience she knew that it was not easy to talk to an orchestra en masse; they were like a herd of animals, wary, untrusting, cynical. This combination of individual sensitivity and group strength could make them aggressive. And yet, Imogen Makepeace showed no fear. She was no performer, that was clear - unsmiling, dressed in a navy pleated skirt and sensible court shoes, her hazelnut-brown silky hair tied back in an unfashionable ruffled scrunchie. Posy frowned as she tried to recall who or what it was that Imogen reminded her of. A nun: that was it. She was terrifyingly on-message, devoted to her cause, unable to be deflected from her purpose of promoting Godfrey's music, regardless of her audience's attitude. A zealot.

After a brief speech, Imogen returned to her chair and clicked the computer into action. The film began.

First scene: a windswept beach with a rough, grassy bank, the camera slowly approaching the figure of a man, huddled by a bonfire. The camera bypassed the man and focussed on the fire, seeming to enter the flames. Over the sound of intense crackling, Godfrey's voice was heard, with its flat Yorkshire accent.

'I've always been fascinated by the idea of fire. The violence of it. Not the cosy side. The sheer, bloody heat of it.'

A searing chord was heard, and the scene cut to a clinical studio where an unkempt string quartet were rehearsing, each player facing a flimsy metal stand weighed down with copious sheets of heavily sellotaped music which looked about to avalanche onto the floor. The music continued noisily for a few seconds, and then, back to the beach, where the figure of the composer was seen throwing driftwood onto the fire.

'It was Melvyn who approached me about doing Dante's *Inferno* for ENO,' the voice-over continued, 'but I knew from the start that it wouldn't be a literal interpretation. I tend to use literature just as a starting point. It's more like a commentary, a meditation on Dante's *inferno*, and on the meaning of fire and my own position within that dichotomy as an artist. That's why it became *Minniver's Inferno*. It wasn't my idea, it was Melvyn, to put the artist at the centre of the dramaturgy. It's not necessarily me going through the *inferno*, it's any artist. All artists. Shoot the messenger. We're all poor doomed buggers.' After some wheezy laughter, the string quartet music surged again, vicious pizzicato stabs alternating with those searing chords. Then suddenly, the scene cut to a brightly lit studio, circa 1981, with Melvyn Bragg seated in a swivel chair.

'Godfrey, *Inferno* owes very little to traditional operatic models, in fact you've described it as a staged representation of textual and linguistic labyrinths. More Berio than Mozart, then?'

'Oh, yeah, you could say that.'

'In fact some critics have suggested that you're operating within the mainstream European avant-garde tradition here, rather than ploughing a peculiarly English furrow, which you did with your first opera, *Sutton Hoo Burning*.'

'I don't see what was *peculiarly English* about *Sutton Hoo Burning*,' replied the composer amicably. 'People seemed to be looking for a link to folk music and whatnot. If you look at the language, you'll see that I was still working within the parameters of mainstream European modernism. Though I don't see how you can refer to an avant-garde *tradition*, Melvyn. The idea of the avant-garde is to *overturn* tradition.'

'Maybe if people overturn tradition in the same way over a period of time, their efforts start to sound traditional,' commented Melvyn Bragg with a raised eyebrow.

‘You cheeky bastard,’ Godfrey deadpanned. ‘You’re suggesting I’m part of the postmodern decadence. Bollocks. I’ve always believed that it’s an artist’s role to innovate, and if you can’t do that, you shouldn’t be in the business.’

The film suddenly cut to what looked like an amateur video. Godfrey Maxwell Minniver was crying, in front of a wildly wobbling camera.

‘I’ve got nothing new to say,’ he wept. ‘HOLD THAT FUCKING CAMERA STILL, YOU SILLY COW!’

For a moment, the camera appeared to swing wildly to the right, revealing the tatty floral wallpaper of a bedroom.

‘Are you all right, Minty?’ Godfrey muttered.

A muffled voice was heard. ‘Just carry on, Godfrey.’

‘You’re bleeding.’

‘I’m all right.’

Godfrey collected himself. ‘I didn’t mean to hurt you. I’m just so fucking depressed. How do you innovate once everything’s been done? Every quarter tone, every note on every synthesiser, every concept, every fucking work of fucking Samuel Beckett has been transmuted into somebody’s fucking tone poem. I’ve nothing left to say. I’ve failed. Failed!’ The intimate home video went black, and the viewers were returned to the fire on the beach. This time, Godfrey was not alone; a far-eastern gentleman in an orange robe squatted next to him on the sand. The flames illuminated their faces as they sat in companionable silence, sharing a bag of crisps.

‘It was meeting Huang Po that turned my life around,’ Godfrey’s voice-over continued. ‘I’d had a huge success with *Inferno*, and for years I was just coasting along on the back of that. I turned it into an orchestral suite, a song cycle, a set of unaccompanied choruses, a series of string quartets and a book of Preludes and Fugues. Not forgetting half a dozen education projects.’

A rapid sequence of black and white press photographs followed, showing Godfrey enjoying success for the two decades following Minniver’s *Inferno*. In one photo, he was shaking hands with the Prince of Wales; in another, he was surrounded by smiling music students grasping instruments and a score of the opera; and yet another photograph showed Godfrey receiving a Gramophone award for a live recording of the opera at Covent Garden. Then, back to the fire.

‘It was all false,’ he said. ‘Minty kept telling me to be careful. I was surrounded by weasels,

all of 'em telling me how wonderful I was. You begin to believe your own publicity. But on a deeper level I knew I was lost. I got to the stage where I couldn't write a note. So, I had a breakdown.'

On that comment, the film returned to the string quartet; the camera focussed on the first violinist, a tiny man with a bush of white hair which cocooned his head like a foam microphone shield. The player's bow was scraping his bottom string with vicious, percussive power; one or two strings had escaped from the bow and threatened to entangle themselves within his hair. There was a close up of the music, balanced precariously on the stand; the viewer was shown a repeat mark and the words 'DA CAPO', meaning start again at the beginning. Perspiring, the violinist poked at the music with the end of his bow, but instead of deftly turning back to the first page, he succeeded in knocking it all onto the floor. The music ground to a halt, with an almighty exclamation of 'SHIT!'

The musicians of L'OEIL were watching, arms folded, some half asleep; but each player gave an ironic chuckle as they empathised with the violinist's plight. Imogen Makepeace raised her chin and smiled tolerantly, firmly refusing to laugh. This was obviously the emotional climax of the film, and not to be regarded lightly. She turned up the volume slightly.

'A friend suggested I went on retreat, to try to rediscover myself as an artist. So I went to Tibet. I met artists from all disciplines, and I have to say, I learnt the value of chance. It wasn't something I'd dabbled in before, letting the music unfold in a way that was outside of my direct control. I stopped trying to play God. I wanted to facilitate music, not invent it.'

The camera now revealed a manuscript, with the title *DEIONEUS INFERNO*.

'I was off the scene for some time, getting over my breakdown. I wasn't confident enough of my own ideas to really want to push the new stuff I was creating. And of course it was a miracle that my publishers wanted to stay with me. Because there aren't as many notes to publish as there used to be.'

The camera now showed the first page of the score. The observing musicians leaned forwards to get a better view; despite themselves, they had been drawn into the drama of Godfrey's life story. As the composer had indicated, there were not many notes to be seen, and yet the score

was covered in markings. A huge black rectangle covered half of the first page, with a treble clef protruding from one side, linked to a falling shower of note-heads with no stave. The next shape was a triangle, made up of tiny numbers, fractions drawn out in a neat italic freehand. Posy was quite familiar with graphic notation, having created such pieces with the MABO players, and she watched with growing curiosity. For Godfrey Maxwell Minniver to have turned away from fully-notated, deeply complex musical textures to semi-improvised work, where the players were free to interpret vaguely descriptive notation using their own initiative, she knew that he must have undergone a major change in his aesthetic direction. But as her interest in Godfrey's work grew, the players around her seemed increasingly hostile. Bernard rubbed his face noisily as if very tired, and shrugged to himself. Leif was studying his split ends and glancing occasionally at the film. Nicole, the trumpet player, sat with legs neatly crossed, swinging a soft leather moccasin off one tanned foot. Her arms were folded, and she looked annoyed yet calm, as if she were about to win someone in a fight. But if the players didn't like the look of Godfrey's new direction, a worse surprise was in store.

'Deioneus Inferno would never have happened had it not been for my assistant, Imogen Makepeace, and her contacts in France. She arranged for the piece to be premiered by one of the country's best young orchestras, *l'Orchestre Élite des Intimes du Louvre*.'

The rest of the voice-over was drowned out, as the players realised that the graphic score on the film was meant for them!

'But surely, this Inferno was just an experiment. He was confused, *non?*' said Leif quickly. '*Et maintenant*, he has moved on again to writing proper music.'

Imogen Makepeace looked a little flustered.

'Listen!' she said loudly above the rabble. '*Écoutez! C'est pas fini!* There's more! The film explains how to interpret the score. There's a workshop where he goes through the score with Huang Po, discussing the philosophical meaning behind it.'

'Ah, this is rubbish,' said Bernard forcefully. The fact that he had resorted to English only served to emphasise how vehemently he wished to get his message across. 'It's like the 1960's. It has all been done before.'

Nicole blew a dismissive raspberry and walked away, turning her back on the film.

'Please listen,' said Imogen Makepeace firmly, and the musicians sulkily quietened themselves. The film had progressed to a scene where Godfrey was in a classroom with some student musicians, and his orange-clad friend Huang Po was leafing through the score of

Deioneus Inferno, beaming. To the surprise of the viewers, he had a high-pitched, gentle voice with a strong American accent.

‘What I love about this, Godfrey,’ said Huang Po, ‘is how you’ve created a beautiful thread of connection to your old work. You haven’t felt the need to destroy, in order to innovate.’

The students watched Godfrey curiously, waiting for his reaction.

‘Thank you. Yes, there is a connection. Deioneus went into the inferno in his own way. He didn’t do it voluntarily, but it did come about because of his actions. The thing is, though, unlike Dante, Deioneus doesn’t come out the other side.’

Huang Po looked thoughtful.

‘No, he dies,’ he commented sadly. ‘I guess you could say he’s murdered.’

‘Shoved onto a pyre of burning coals and wood,’ Godfrey clarified with relish. ‘But it’s not just the conceptual thing that hooked me into this myth...although I do relate to it. I’ve never got on very well with my father in law.’

Huang Po turned to the students and continued in his gently nasal drone. ‘Erm, in case you’re not familiar with the myth... erm...Deioneus gets pushed into the fire by his son-in-law, Ixion. He’s stolen Ixion’s horses, in revenge for not being paid for his daughter’s hand in marriage, and this makes Ixion *very angry*. So he gets his own back in a truly horrible way.’

The students laughed nervously.

‘I saw this as a metaphor for my whole experience of life, really,’ added Godfrey. ‘People let you down, and if you complain, they try to silence you.’

‘I think we’ve all felt like that at times,’ said Huang Po wistfully, appealing to the students for nods of agreement.

‘That’s how it is for any artist alive today,’ shrugged Godfrey. ‘But I was about to explain, it’s not just the connotations of the myth that attracted me. It’s the sheer sonic potential. The wood. The coal. The fire. The violence. It’s an orchestral wet dream!’

Suddenly, the ears of the audience were assailed by an intense wall of improvised sound; every student in the classroom was attacking their musical instrument with manic energy. It was as if the instruments were making no sound, and the players were straining harder and harder to make them speak. Only the instruments *were* speaking - indeed, they were shrieking, screaming, wailing.

Imogen Makepeace looked around, and saw that the musicians of L’OEIL were in a state of revolt. The film was almost over, but she clicked it to pause, creating a bizarre frozen moment where a young girl oboist was in blurred close-up, pointing her instrument to the

ceiling, her neck bulging with effort, a blue vein standing out on her forehead like a miniature river Thames. There was silence in the room. And then, a voice.

‘So. You’ve seen the film.’

Godfrey Maxwell-Minniver had finally staggered out of bed, and was standing in the threshold. A huge belch followed his comment.

‘Excuse me.’

The players’ hostility was put on hold; they were too well-mannered to openly confront one of the UK’s most respected composers. And Godfrey, despite his diminutive stature and unkempt appearance, did possess a certain authority.

‘What’s up?’ he said to Imogen Makepeace. ‘Have you handed out the parts?’

She fumbled in her briefcase.

‘Let’s just do it,’ said Godfrey reasonably. Lamb-like, the musicians moved over to the other side of the hall, where their stands and chairs awaited them. They put their parts on their stands, and looked to Leif for direction.

‘Ah, okay,’ said Leif, running his hand through his hair, as usual. ‘I think we’re all pretty clear of the story here. It is one of...of pain, of suffering, of resentment. Alors, for the first gesture, think of that. You can choose any note... I think... yes, any note. I will hold the gesture and bring you off when we get to the descending scale.’

He raised his arms in the air, his head still very much down in the score. Posy noticed the slim grace of his limbs, and admired his courage, in trying to create a living piece from this score which gave so little away. Then the arms came down indecisively, while the players awaited their cue. Leif looked around the room and caught Posy’s eye; ready to respond, she rushed forwards to stand beside him.

‘These numbers,’ whispered Leif, ‘what do they mean?’

He indicated a sequence of numbers set at intervals horizontally at the bottom of the page.

‘It’s a basic temporal framework,’ explained Posy quietly, scrutinising the score. ‘Look - thirty seconds, sixty seconds...you need a clock of some sort. A stopwatch. This gesture lasts for about half a minute. Then you start on the descending scale.’

‘Ah!’ Leif’s eyes lit up. ‘Thanks.’

Leif was wearing a watch, and he unfastened it so it could sit on his stand. He raised his arms again.

‘ang on a minute,’ said Godfrey. ‘They can’t just play any note. There’s a system. It’s outlined in the introduction.’

‘Ah, *pardon*,’ said Leif. He flicked back through the score, and frowned, unable to find it.

‘Where’s the introduction?’ Godfrey asked Imogen Makepeace.

‘Oh, sorry! It’s right here.’

She rummaged in her brief case and brought out what looked like a copy of the Yellow Pages.

‘Sorry, Godfrey. Yes, here it is. There’s an index in the back, Leif.’

She handed the tome to Leif, whose arm drooped painfully on receiving its weight. Posy looked at the front cover: *Deioneus Inferno. Introductory guide to notational systems and playing techniques.*

‘So, I need to know what notes we are allowed to play,’ Leif mumbled as he scrutinised the index.

‘Oh aye,’ replied Godfrey, ‘there’s got to be a bit of a system or we’d end up playing pretty-pretty major and minor chords. The music’s not totally free. I’ve tried that and it doesn’t work.’

He laughed wheezily.

‘So what do I look under?’ asked Leif.

‘Harmonic Parameters,’ replied Imogen Makepeace. ‘Or, Harmonic Fields. Or is it Twelve Tone Matrix Calculator? Er, I don’t know.’

‘*C’est ici*,’ said Leif, pointing to a page of comfortingly familiar manuscript, treble and bass staves and a sequence of notes.

‘That’s it,’ Godfrey confirmed. ‘But you can’t just play any of those notes. There’s a code. If you play that one, you can’t play this one. If you play this one, you can’t play that one. It’s all explained at the bottom of the page.’

‘How will the players remember?’ asked Leif.

‘How will the players remember?’ repeated Godfrey. ‘*How will the players remember?* Bloody hell.’

He laughed sardonically and stalked off to a corner of the room, where he sat in a delicate ornamental chair belching and coughing.

Leif shrugged.

‘Okay, we’ll start. Er, I’ve studied the diagram and, *en effet*, you mustn’t play anything which sounds traditionally harmonious, *comprenez?* So just listen to each other and try, okay?’

He picked up his watch and observed the second hand ticking its way up to the figure twelve.

He raised his arms, and as the second hand clicked into place, brought them down. The orchestra began to play. Leif stood, arms dangling redundantly by his sides, watching the

time going by. Then he raised his arms again and made a gradually descending gesture. The players followed him; at first, the effect was a little like an orchestra tuning up, half-hearted and uncertain. Now, as their notes slid downwards, the sound began to resemble something more organised and meaningful. Encouraged, Leif flicked over the page of the score. Posy heard him take an in-breath and hold it, his arms raised and his eyes wide open, staring at the page. Then he lowered his arms. The music gave way to silence as the players looked on for guidance.

‘Ah, *merde*.’

She rushed over to see if she could help.

‘Do you speak German?’ asked Leif.

‘Er, I have a bit of musicians’ German,’ replied Posy. She looked at the score. In the centre of this page was an angry-looking circle, made up of darkly-printed words, jutting out at all angles.

‘*Bellend*,’ murmured Posy, ‘I think that means barking. *Brummend* - that is definitely growling. I recognise these from somewhere.’

‘Ah, from a dog training book,’ snapped Leif. ‘Go on. What else?’

‘Oh, God. *Klappernd*, that means clacking or clapping or something. That one beginning with Q, I don’t recognise that.’

‘What’s up?’ called Godfrey.

‘Ah, could you help us with these German words?’ asked Leif. ‘We need to have them translated and also to know what we are supposed to do. I mean, how we are to interpret them..’

‘*Avec plaisir*,’ responded Godfrey in his habitual grumpy tone.

He walked over to Leif’s music stand and placed a pair of copper-rimmed spectacles on his nose, which gave him an owlish appearance.

‘This section,’ Godfrey explained, ‘reflects the cyclic nature of the inferno. There is no beginning, there is no end. Thought no longer exists. Nor time. But there is sound.’

He looked up at Leif, and there was an unnerving silence. Godfrey obviously felt he had explained enough.

‘Ah, *oui*,’ Leif responded. ‘But what do these German words mean?’

‘I’m very surprised you don’t recognise them,’ Godfrey remarked. ‘They’re terms established by Stockhausen back in the mid sixties. Terms to describe the different effects in his electronic masterpiece *Mikrophonie I*.’

‘Oh, *Mikrophonie I*,’ said Posy excitedly, ‘We did that at college.’

‘I should hope you did,’ said Godfrey mercilessly.

Leif looked uncomfortable. ‘Well, it wasn’t on the curriculum at the conservatoire.’

Godfrey laughed. ‘It wouldn’t be, mate. Not at your conservatoire! But I presume you did it in your professional musical training.’

‘*Ah, non,*’ said Leif, trying to rescue the situation by affecting a tone of fascination and pleasure at encountering a new masterpiece.

‘Well she’s already explained half of the words. What else don’t you know? Piepsend is cheeping; Fauchend is hissing an’ spitting; Gellend is yelling...come on, Grunzend? *Grunzend?* Isn’t that obvious?’

‘Grunting,’ said Posy quickly.

‘And Quakend? Come on!’

‘Quacking?’

‘Well done, Einstein. Top marks.’

‘And Rattelnd, rattling?’ interjected Leif, his confidence building.

‘Exactamundo.’

‘What about Quietschend?’ Leif called out, as Godfrey was turning his back to walk away.

‘Is that Quietly?’

Godfrey stopped walking. Posy heard a rasping sound as he lowered his head and rubbed at his stubbly beard, as if very fatigued.

‘Jesus Christ,’ said Godfrey. ‘It’s not *quiet*, or I would have written *piano*, wouldn’t I?’

He sighed. ‘How do I explain it? It’s an expressive word...’

Godfrey turned round, right hand on his forehead, left hand sculpting the air helplessly as he groped for a way of explaining his art.

‘Squeaking. Squealing. I can’t translate it. It’s a feeling. A gesture of pain...’

At that moment, a faint, strange sound was heard. The musicians turned from the drama going on between Posy, Leif and Godfrey, to try to work out where the noise was coming from. Posy recognised it immediately. It was coming from a small cloakroom just off the hall, and it was Tansy MacIlraith practising her oboe.

‘What’s that?’ said Godfrey, bewildered. ‘That’s weird.’

He looked oddly alarmed.

‘That is *Quietschend*. That is the sound. *Écoutez*, you bastards.’

A thin, pitchless straining sound was heard, then a silence. Then another sound - high-pitched this time, but grainy, more a texture than a musical note. Again; silence. Tansy was trying out a batch of reeds that had been sent to her from the Reed Exchange Collective.

‘I’m really sorry,’ said Posy, panicking, ‘she’s not supposed to be in here. It’s the oboist from my orchestra. She’s trying to find a new reed. I’ll stop her. *Je m’excuse*,’ she added to the players.

‘No!’ yelled Godfrey. ‘That sound sums up the whole aesthetic of the piece. I have to use that sound!’ He began laughing. ‘Jesus Christ! What a fucking gorgeous sound.’

Posy opened the door of the little room and exposed Tansy, sitting on the floor, oboe in mouth, surrounded by reeds. She took the instrument out of her mouth, smiled and waved.

‘Hello!’

Posy was dying inside.

‘Who is she?’ asked Godfrey in awe.

Tansy stepped into the hall.

‘I’m Tansy,’ she said.

Godfrey held out his hand.

‘I’m Godfrey.’

