The Gilman family is stationed in Vienna, Austria, in 1956, at the height of the Cold War. While Jim works undercover for the CIA at the American Embassy, Peggy spends the Christmas holidays conducting an unofficial murder investigation. She discovers that all of the suspects have hidden depths and will go to great lengths to disguise their pasts-rather like Vienna itself.

Diplomatic Impunity: A Viennese Christmas Mystery

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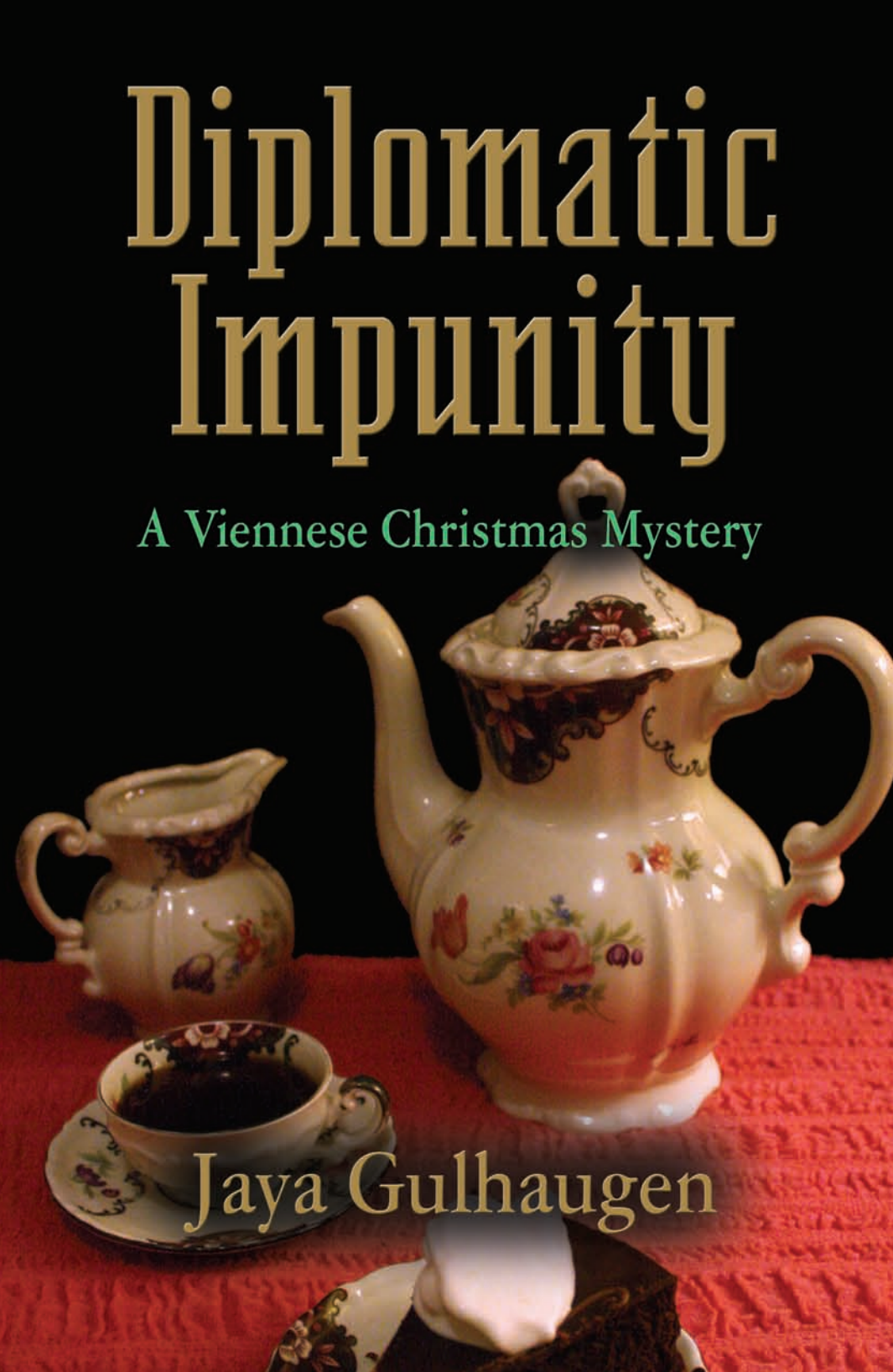

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PROLOGUE
Tuesday, December 25, at 3:17 p.m.

THE MOTIONLESS BODY lay supine, its fractured right leg splayed at an unnatural angle. Both arms were broken, blood pooling onto the parquet floor of the ballroom. Facial muscles contorted as the punctured lungs filled with blood. Within sixty seconds breathing became impossible. Two minutes later all brain activity came to a stop. By some twist of fate, the head was completely unscathed. From the neck up it looked as if the person might have been praying for deliverance or perhaps just examining the frescoes on the ceiling.

High-spirited singing of Christmas carols in the next room had muffled the sound of the fall. When the body was discovered, guests, hosts, and staff reacted with shock and disbelief. Many people had feared, even loathed, the victim. Some would benefit from this untimely death. One observer, however, was not surprised. That person knew *exactly* what had happened.

CHAPTER ONE
Monday, December 17—eight days earlier

THE WIND SHIFTED, soaking the Hungarians. The covered walkway outside of the American Consulate, which usually provided adequate protection against the weather, was suddenly useless. With yet another winter storm blowing in from the east, the Hungarian refugees pressed against the cold stones of the building as they waited stoically for visas.

Peggy Gilman fastened the top toggle of her green loden coat as the rain turned icy. She shook her shoulder-length strawberry blond hair and opened her umbrella. "We need to get the babies out of the rain!" she called to her friend and fellow Embassy wife, Helen Pickering. They made their way along the endless line of refugees, many of them in threadbare jackets, the lucky ones wearing overcoats donated by the Red Cross and distributed at the refugee camps outside Vienna. With the few words of Hungarian they had picked up, Peggy and Helen directed the mothers to the nearby nursery on Weihburg Gasse.

As Peggy looked across the Ringstrasse that encircled the inner city, she could see the bust of Franz Lehár near the entrance to the Stadtpark. The park had been designed in 1862 in what Austrians considered the daringly informal English style, but to Peggy, who was used to Central Park, it felt regimented, even rigid, its hedges lined up with military precision. In the December rain it looked bleak and uninviting.

The last of the leaves twirled in brown eddies, waiting to be raked up and disposed of by the park workers. Through the bare branches of the trees, Peggy glimpsed the statue of Johann Strauss, Jr. playing his violin. She remembered how dazzling the gilded sculpture had looked when she first saw it as a child. She felt a stab of disappointment that it was now a dull brownish gray, stripped of its gold. Had the statue been denuded by the Nazis? Was the precious metal needed to feed the starving people of Vienna during the Great Depression of the 1930s?

When she had asked Jim about the statue, he had reminded her that in Vienna there were many questions that were better not

broached. The 1956 State Department Country Report issued to diplomats on their way to Vienna contained this warning: "In social situations, questions pertaining to the years between 1938 and the present should be approached with great discretion and preferably not at all. It is considered the height of rudeness to bring up any kind of unpleasantness from that difficult era."

"Look at Lehár, Helen. I think he's trying to tell us to relax a bit. Have some fun. Listen to some light music!"

"Can you believe it's the seventeenth of December? We've been helping out with the Hungarians for almost two months straight. I'm ready for a party!"

"We deserve a break, don't we?" Peggy agreed. "Let's plan a Christmas bash!"

Peggy smiled at her friend. Helen had been a diplomat's wife for seven years, but dressed in her shabby brown coat, flannel headscarf, and sensible shoes, she still didn't look the part. Except for her exuberant smile and irreverent manner, she could have passed for a refugee herself.

"Last night Jim told me that the Canadian Consulate is letting the refugees line up inside their building while the cold weather lasts." Peggy felt a twinge of guilt about her warm coat and sturdy umbrella as she turned and looked back at the shivering people waiting in line.

"Maybe we should do that, too," Helen said. "It'll be freezing until the end of March, from what everyone says about winters in Vienna." She shook her head. "Still, I'll bet their lines are not anywhere near as long as ours. It seems that everyone wants the American dream. After more than twenty years of Nazis and Communists, these Hungarians are not going to let a little bad weather stop them from a shot at life, liberty, and the pursuit of a split-level in suburbia." Helen's cynical tone of voice belied her warm and caring nature.

"It's ironic, Helen, isn't it? Here we are, working like galley slaves, diapering babies, sorting old clothes at Traiskirchen, and doling out food at the soup kitchen. And yet…." Peggy paused, then grinned. "I don't know about you, but I'm having the time of my life!"

Traiskirchen Refugee Camp, twenty-five miles southeast of Vienna, was an example of the changing fortunes of Austria. Originally a military academy for officers of the Austro-Hungarian army, the Nazis had requisitioned it for use as a boarding school for Hitler Youth, after which it had housed Russian troops for the ten years of the Occupation. When the Hungarians began streaming over the border in October of 1956, Traiskirchen was hastily transformed into a temporary home for thousands of refugees hoping to settle in the West.

"I feel the same way!" Helen said, her face breaking into a dimpled smile. She had often talked to Peggy about her childhood as the oldest of nine children growing up in Portland, Maine. Her father, Ian Jones, had spent the Depression years working odd jobs, trying to scrape together enough money to feed his family. Helen had lost track of the number of cold-water flats they had stayed in and then had to vacate in the middle of the night when they couldn't pay the rent. Her mother's greatest wish had been that Helen marry well, though she had made sure that Helen trained as a nurse in case she had to support herself.

The day after Pearl Harbor, she and all her brothers, including the youngest, Billy, marched down to the recruiting office to enlist, she as an army nurse and the boys in all of the different branches of the military. A few months later, the blond curls and debonair manner of a certain Lt. Pickering at a U.S.O. dance in Portland had captivated her. After they were married in 1946, Carruthers used the GI Bill to earn a master's degree in political science at Georgetown University. Shortly thereafter he joined the State Department.

"Part of the reason I married CR was so that I wouldn't have to work, and here I am using my nursing skills after all. Still, I'd much rather do this than try to organize a ladies' luncheon for the Embassy wives!" Helen laughed.

"I'll bet Carruthers will be an ambassador in five years, or as it says in the Diplomatic List, *Son Excellence, L'Ambassadeur Extraordinaire et Plenipotentiaire*. You'll make a terrific ambassador's wife. As for me, I'm just happy that Jim was assigned to Vienna this fall. Langley, Virginia, with four small children, was starting to feel a bit provincial. The most excitement I could hope for was Jim bringing home a colleague from work for potluck and some uncensored conversation."

"Where on earth did his parents come up with the name Carruthers?" Peggy had asked Jim after the two couples were introduced in October.

"I'm not sure they did. Carruthers probably looked through the State Department Directory for the most uppercrust-sounding name he could find and embellished it to his satisfaction. I can't blame him if he did a bit to spiff up his image. State is notorious for its snobbishness."

"Well, then I'm glad you're with the Agency," Peggy had said. "That way you can stick with plain old Jim and save James Hilton Gilman for signing your checks."

"You know how the Station Chief is about people with what he calls 'high mucky-muck' backgrounds," Jim had replied. "Syd Thornhedge assumes they're idiots, even if they're not. I've heard he's ruined more than a few careers simply out of jealousy. He's a war hero, though. Engineered a daring escape from a German prisoner-of-war camp, managing to rescue twenty of his men. Now that we're in the Cold War, nobody's more gung-ho about fighting the Communists than he is. I just keep a low profile around old Syd and try to get the job done."

After two years in the sleepy Washington suburb of Langley, Peggy Gilman had looked forward to Jim's new assignment in the capital of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire. As for Jim, he was anxious to get as far away as possible from the politics and in-fighting at Headquarters and back to being an operative, which is what he had signed up for in 1947 when the Office of Strategic Services was restructured as the CIA.

Peggy had fond memories of spending a year of her childhood in Vienna eating schnitzel and apple strudel and learning to ski. Peggy's mother, Dr. Colette Hingham, had researched possible cures for multiple sclerosis at the University of Vienna while Peggy went to the local school and learned to speak fluent German.

After stints in Breslau and Berne, Dr. Hingham had moved her two daughters to England, where she continued her medical research. Peggy decided she liked England and persuaded her mother to let her stay on when it was time for the family to move back to New York. Dr. Hingham arranged for Peggy to board at the

Blythe School for Young Ladies in Norwich. Peggy stayed in England until 1939, when, with war looming, her mother insisted that she abandon her plans to pursue her studies at Cambridge University and return to the States.

In the fall of 1956, Peggy had shopped for clothes for herself and the children at the newly opened Tysons Corner Mall in Northern Virginia. Nobody seemed to know what would be available in Vienna, and shopping at PXes in Germany was an uncertain business, both in terms of the quality of the merchandise and whether the MPs at the door would let non-military personnel in.

The whole family was issued green diplomatic passports. The words "diplomatic immunity" sounded reassuring, but the passports were stamped with the warning that no protection would be available if they ventured into Albania, Bulgaria, Communist China, North Korea, or Communist-controlled Vietnam. There was a separate stamp ominously stating that the passports were not valid for travel in Hungary.

"What's a diplomatic passport?" Jane, her oldest, had asked, when Jim showed the passports to the four children.

"It means that they can't put us in jail, but if you children misbehave, we'll all be declared *persona non grata*, and we'll have to leave the country within twenty-four hours," Jim had warned, turning to Zeke and looking at him pointedly.

"Jane threatened to demagnetize my chess pieces. Does that count?" asked Zeke.

Jane shot her brother a withering glare, then smiled sweetly at her father. "Daddy, Miss Brizendine encourages us to do science experiments at home," she explained. "Of course I knew it wouldn't actually work."

"I think my passport is beautiful," whispered Wendy. "Green and gold, my favorite colors." Wendy, eighteen months younger than Jane, was a winsome dark-eyed beauty who looked nothing like the other three children. Peggy often wondered whether Wendy was confirmation of the rumor that there was American Indian blood in the Gilman family. Jim scoffed that stories like that were "oral tradition at its worst," but Peggy continued to speculate about the source of Wendy's exotic looks.

The Gilmans drove up to Manhattan on October 10 in their brand new Ford station wagon crammed with suitcases and duffel bags and found their way to West 44th Street on the Hudson River.

The girls wore plaid shirtwaists, straw hats with blue-ribboned brims, and white kid gloves, while the boys squirmed uncomfortably in their dark blue trousers and white button-down shirts. Jim looked like he'd stepped out of a bandbox, in his charcoal gray suit and black fedora. Peggy was suitably elegant in a black-and-white Chanel-style suit from Woodward and Lothrop, the elegant department store in downtown D.C. known to all as Woodies.

As the SS *Constitution* left her moorings at Pier 84, the Gilmans threw yellow, pink, and blue streamers and waved to Peggy's mother and uncle and all the other New Yorkers on the dock who were saying good-bye to friends and family or were just there for the excitement of an ocean liner setting sail.

The *Constitution* was only five years old, very modern and sleek, very American. She was also the most romantic ship Peggy could imagine sailing on. Only six months earlier, she had carried Grace Kelly, along with her family, her bridesmaids, and over eighty pieces of luggage, to the French Riviera to marry Prince Rainier of Monaco. Peggy felt a bit like royalty herself, traveling first class, courtesy of the United States Government.

Despite the turbulent October crossing, Peggy enjoyed herself thoroughly. She took the children to the promenade deck, where they snuggled under navy blue wool blankets and were served bouillon in the morning and tea in the afternoon. She supervised shuffleboard games, kept an eye out as they swam in the indoor pool, and sat with them as they watched first-run movies in the theater.

The best part of the transatlantic voyage was dining at the second sitting while her children were happily ensconced in the playroom. Peggy could wear her most elegant gowns, confident that the children wouldn't spill food on her, and she could relax and talk to Jim. The Cold War might break out in ten different places simultaneously, but here in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, there wasn't a blessed thing Jim could do about it. Peggy knew that she

had better take advantage of this short interlude, because once they were overseas he would be on duty twenty-four hours a day.

The Gilmans disembarked in Genoa, a sepia postcard from another age, with its ancient, crumbling buildings and golden sunlight. The friendly Italians cooed over Sammy, her youngest child, calling him *piccolino bambino* and ruffling his blond curls. The next day the family loaded themselves into their station wagon, which had been hoisted safely off the *Constitution* onto the dock, to the applause of the local bystanders. The enormous American station wagon was quite a curiosity in 1956.

As soon as the Gilmans crossed the northern border of Italy and drove into Austria, they noticed a chill in the air. That evening in the hotel restaurant, Peggy realized that an American family with four energetic children brought a chill to the restaurant as well.

The children immediately gobbled up all of the bread and butter on the table. Forty-five minutes later, when the main course arrived, they were no longer hungry. Peggy and Jim rushed through their own meals, while the children whined with boredom. The other guests made pointed remarks in German about boorish Americans and expressed astonishment that such unmanageable children had been allowed into the restaurant. Even Sammy failed to charm.

Peggy was mortified. Jim, though he could speak the language fluently thanks to two years of college German and the Gilman ear for languages, gave no sign that he was aware of the stir they were causing until they were out of the restaurant. “I guess we’re not in Italy anymore,” he joked once they were safely in their hotel room. “I’m sure Vienna will have its own charms. They may just be less obvious.”

The Gilmans arrived at their assigned house in Vienna after dark on October 24 and were welcomed by Frau Mitzi, the resident housekeeper and cook. The short, plump woman served them a meal of liver dumpling soup with thick slices of pumpernickel bread and butter molded in the shape of roses. The leberknödelsuppe smelled divine, but Peggy took the precaution of telling the children it was beef stew with dumplings. She needn’t have worried; all four of the children were captivated by the butter roses and gazed at Mitzi with awe.

The next morning a raw October wind rattled the windows, and the sky was a sheet of gray. Peggy decided that Jane was ideally

suited to walk down the street to the *Bäckerei* for fresh rolls and didn't need anyone to accompany her.

"I can't do that!" Jane wailed. "I'm only eight and a half years old. I don't speak Austrian!"

"Nonsense," retorted Peggy. "Austrians speak German. You spoke perfect German when we left Berlin two years ago. Just say *'Sechs Semmeln, bitte*' and come right back."

"Why can't Wendy do it? She's almost as old as I am. Anyway, I'm too shy."

Wendy was seven, Zeke was five, and three-year-old Sammy was practically a baby. Peggy, knowing that Jane was secretly thrilled to be picked for this important job, handed her a ten-schilling note and sent her down the street.

"*Sechs Semmeln, sechs Semmeln,*" Jane was still repeating as she arrived back fifteen minutes later, clutching a small brown paper bag. She claimed to have almost died from the terror of speaking German to a stranger, but Peggy merely smiled and asked her to join the family in the dining room and pass around the warm, crusty Kaiser rolls.

"Thank you, Lord, for delivering us from Wonder Bread," intoned Jim as he winked at Jane.

Just then a tall, thin man with sallow skin and lank, black hair barged in the front door, yelling, "Jim, you're a day late; get in my car. We're heading east."

"That's the Station Chief, Syd Thornhedge," Jim whispered as he grabbed his overcoat and briefcase. "Don't wait up for me. Contact the Press Attaché's wife if you need anything. The Lowells are our nearest Embassy neighbors." Jim scribbled down a name and address, and pulling his coat on as he went out the door, he was gone.

After breakfast the three oldest children walked to the corner of Hasenauerstrasse and Gregor-Mendel-Strasse, where they waited for the school bus to take them to the Anglo-American School. The English-language school, organized by the British, Indian, and American diplomatic missions, was the successor to the army schools that had been set up during the Allied Occupation. The girls boarded the bus, but Zeke was told he couldn't.

He ran back to the house, sobbing. Zeke finally managed to tell Peggy that he wasn't allowed on the bus "because of the Hungarians." Peggy picked up the scrap of paper that Jim had left on the table, took Zeke by the hand, and walked with him down Türkenschanzstrasse to Ashton and Frances Lowell's white stucco villa.

"Your little boy's right," Frances said, smiling down at Zeke. "Yesterday the Hungarians tried to overthrow their Soviet puppet government, but by early this morning Russian tanks began entering Budapest to put down the rebellion. Thousands of Hungarians are fleeing the country. All Embassy personnel with cars have driven to the border to assess the situation. I guess that means no one's available to pick up the kindergarten children at noon."

Peggy volunteered to help with carpooling if Frances would come with her to show her the way. She knew Zeke wouldn't want to miss his first day of school.

The Hungarian Revolution had indeed erupted on October 23, the day before their arrival, with the first stream of what would become almost 200,000 refugees pouring into Vienna. Students from the Budapest Technical University, along with workers, had pulled down the huge bronze statue of Stalin in Felvonulasi Square. They cut the hammer and sickle from their flags, burned Communist propaganda leaflets, and threw Molotov cocktails at Soviet tanks. The revolutionaries hadn't had any real chance of overthrowing the government, but in the ensuing chaos, thousands of Hungarians escaped across the border into Austria.

While Consulate officials worked overtime processing visas, Jim threw himself into the covert work of determining which of those Hungarians were actual refugees, which were Communist spies, which were former Nazis using the opportunity to secure passage out of Europe to the United States or South America, and which were potential "assets," or undercover agents. He worked such long hours that one morning at breakfast Jane demanded to know what he did all day at the office.

"Well, Jane, there's a lot to do. I have to fire off cables, delegate authority, and deny everything if the press calls. And that reminds me, Peggy, I'm going to be late tonight. Don't wait up."

"But, Daddy, how did you learn your job?" Jane persisted. "I mean, were there any classes you had to take to work in an embassy?"

"Actually there were," Jim explained. "In one of them, an instructor advised us to move quickly if we heard anything. Sometimes I wish I had signed up for the lock-picking course," he added after a pause. "That would have saved me a lot of trouble."

Jim winked at Jane, so she knew it was some kind of grownup joke. Peggy frowned, hoping he wasn't actually jimmying locks as part of his undercover work. She must remember to ask him about that later, when the children were out of the way. Of course, I'll never get a straight answer, she reminded herself. I might as well put it out of my mind.

Jim had his covert duties; Peggy, on the other hand, was thrust immediately into "overt" operations. Muffy Mortimer, the wife of the Ambassador, had enlisted her as an aide-de-camp because of her passable German and, more importantly, because of her outgoing personality and enthusiasm. To deal with the thousands of refugees lined up around the American Consulate, first in the rain and then in the sleet and snow, Peggy had helped Muffy organize a soup kitchen, a nursery for the children, and a sewing cooperative.

Women whose families didn't get visas to the United States or Canada desperately needed to earn a living. Hungarian Handiworks, as Peggy had named it, soon began producing cotton peasant blouses, as well as skirts and jackets made of the boiled wool known as loden cloth, all of them colorfully embroidered in traditional Hungarian designs. Peggy had already commissioned several outfits for herself and her daughters.

* * * * *

Helen looked at her watch. "Peggy, it's one o'clock. Let's just check to see that everything is under control with the children before we call it a day." They hurried across the street to the refugee nursery. The babies were all asleep in their cribs, supervised by two mothers.

"It looks like we can leave now," Peggy said to Helen. "How about joining me for tea? Tommy and Nancy are always at the house, playing with my kids, but we've been so busy with the refugees that I've never even invited you over. Frau Mitzi will be delighted to serve us some of her apple strudel, and we can plan our Christmas party."

The Gilman house came with a staff of three: Frau Meier, the wizened but surprisingly strong *Putzfrau* who came in five days a week to do the heavy cleaning; Fräulein Hilde, the pretty, young *Kindermädchen* who took care of the children when Peggy was busy being a diplomat's wife; and, most importantly, Frau Maria Sechberger, the cook and housekeeper.

Short and round, with a smiling face like a dumpling and gray hair pulled back into a bun, Frau Mitzi looked ancient but in fact was only forty-five. She rarely mentioned the war years, but then so many Austrians preferred not to discuss those trying times, except to bemoan the depredations of the Russians who had "liberated" Vienna before the Americans and Brits could get there.

Once Mitzi had alluded to a young man who had gone off to war before they could marry and had never returned. She often told Peggy how happy she was to be part of a family with children.

Helen and Peggy got into the powder blue station wagon, difficult to park on Vienna's narrow streets but invaluable for carpooling large numbers of children to birthday parties, Saturday afternoon movies at the school, and trips to the English Reading Room. It took only about ten minutes to get from the Consulate, just inside the Ring encircling the inner city, to Peggy's house facing Türkenschanz Park.

The Hasenauerstrasse house was one of a row of three-story villas with gray stone façades built in the rather forbidding style of the late 1800s. After World War II, England, France, Russia, and the United States had requisitioned many houses and parceled them out to their embassy and military personnel.

Peggy wondered who had lived in the house during the war. If it had been a Nazi official and his family, the house would probably have belonged to a wealthy Jewish family before the war. She had heard that at the time of the *Anschluss*, Jews had been forced to abandon their houses as well as their businesses in exchange for exit

visas. Who had lived here before the war? That was one of the many questions it was not polite to ask.

Mitzi met them at the front door. "*Meine Damen,* let me take your coats. In this weather, must you really be out helping refugees?" she fussed.

"Well, Mitzi, I'm back now. And we'd absolutely love some tea and pastries. I've told Frau Pickering you're the best cook in Vienna." Mitzi beamed and hurried off to the kitchen to assemble what Peggy knew would be an afternoon treat fit for royalty.

"Helen, would you like a tour of the house?" As Carruthers was a junior officer, the Pickerings had been assigned a rather cramped apartment in the middle of town, on Nibelungengasse. It was conveniently located near historic churches and monuments but was not ideal for an American family with two rambunctious children.

Carruthers took this as a snub. As he frequently complained to Helen, the apartment was not suitable for someone "to the manner born." At such times Helen felt it best not to remind him of his hardscrabble childhood near the docks of Portland, Maine, but to commiserate with him about the injustice.

The first two floors consisted of rooms built around an immense, two-story ballroom. "I'll show you around the first floor, and then we'll go into the ballroom. I can take you upstairs to the bedrooms after that," Peggy offered. The first room to the left of the entrance hall was a library in the Biedermeier style of the early 19th century. Biedermeier was evidently the German version of the Federalist style back home, a clean, restrained neoclassical look, but to Peggy the library felt oppressive. It contained several uncomfortable overstuffed chairs, a bulky, sharp-edged coffee table, and a stiffly embroidered couch. The room was lined with dark, glass-covered bookcases, filled with leather-bound German books.

Peggy had been intrigued to find a complete set of Shakespeare in German and had made a stab at reading *Macbeth*. Her year in Vienna as a child, her wartime work in New York for the Department of the Army censoring German prisoner-of-war letters, and her years in Germany after the war had paid off. She had been pleased to find that the relatively recent translation was easier to understand than the Elizabethan English of the original. The murder

of Duncan, however, was just as incomprehensible in German as it was in English.

"Hi, Sammy!" Peggy said, bending down to kiss her youngest child as she and Helen entered the room. Sammy was happily entertaining himself with his toy cowboys and Indians, Fräulein Hilde keeping an eye on him as she sat in a chair darning socks. Peggy let him continue his game, knowing that he cherished his time alone before the older children came home from school.

Peggy pointed to one of the bookcases. "This is the doorknob Zeke practically impaled himself on a few weeks ago," she told Helen, rolling her eyes. "He was jumping from the top of the bookcase but caught the knob on the way down. Luckily I had just arrived home from the soup kitchen and was able to hoist him off. Mitzi was cooking and didn't hear him scream. I don't know where the *Kindermädchen* was." She sighed. "You'd think that would put Zeke off dangerous games, but only last week he and his friend Hamid broke Jane's bed jumping off the wardrobe in the girls' bedroom. Never a dull moment in this house," she added with a rueful smile.

Peggy had not been prepared for boys, having grown up without brothers. And after her parents' divorce she had seen very little of her father, which didn't give her much preparation for men, either. Jim had been a revelation to her. Though known to his colleagues in the Agency as "the slowest gun in the East," he could be surprisingly daring, or perhaps daringly surprising, in his private life.

Peggy led Helen into the music room, bare except for the Bösendorfer grand piano and a few easy chairs. "This is where Elizabeta Kalinovski gives piano lessons to the girls. She's a very cultivated lady, always enveloped in the scent of Chanel No. 5. Supposedly she's of either White Russian or Polish nobility. She once mentioned to the girls that she prefers the title Countess to that of Fräulein, so that's what Wendy and Jane call her."

Helen laughed. "Sounds like I should sign Nancy up. Carruthers would love to get to know a member of the nobility!"

"Well, I'll ask Elizabeta, Countess Elizabeta, that is, if she has any openings. She holds court here every Thursday afternoon, giving the girls piano lessons and dispensing licorice drops if they cough. Both girls adore her. Lately, Jane has taken to mimicking her

by tucking a handkerchief in her sweater sleeve, for the unexpected sneeze."

The girls practiced daily from the *Kinderlieder Album für Klavier*. Though Wendy was more interested in her ballet classes, Jane loved the piano. Besides her assigned pieces, she practiced the piano parts to easy duets. As a reward, most Saturdays Jim took out his violin and played early Haydn duets with her. Peggy was tone deaf; according to her mother the doctors had removed her musical ability along with her tonsils, but she loved to relax in one of the armchairs with her knitting and listen to the two of them play.

"This is my favorite room!" Peggy's face lit up as they entered the sun parlor on the northeast corner. Unlike the other downstairs rooms, it was bright and airy, with large windows looking out onto Türkenschanz Park. The walls were painted *Schönbrunner* yellow, and the chairs and couch were upholstered in a profusion of flowered chintz. Facing the window was a delicate desk carved of red cherry in the Sisi style, named for the beautiful but ill-fated wife of Franz Josef II.

Jigsaw puzzle pieces and the half-completed scene of an Alpine meadow in summer covered a card table. "It looks kind of gloomy now, but on mornings when the sun decides to come out, this room positively glows," Peggy assured her friend. "Even in this weather, the view of the park is quite spectacular, don't you think? We'll have our tea here after I've given you the rest of the tour."

Peggy and Helen looked out at Türkenschanz Park across the street, a vast expanse of trees and manicured grass now covered with a thin layer of icy snow. The lindens and chestnuts looked ghostly, their dark limbs waving menacingly in the wind. A few people hurried along the winding paths, but this being Vienna, no one would dream of trespassing onto the snow-covered open areas.

The benches were empty except for the man in the dark overcoat and black astrakhan hat, sitting just inside the park where he always sat, he or another man just like him, watching the house. Peggy had pointed him out to Jim a month or so ago, but he had brushed her off.

"I guess the Russians must not have much going on if they're using KGB men from their embassy to watch us day and night. Just

ignore them. But Peggy, don't wave or smile. They don't have your sense of humor." He gave her a stern look, to make sure she knew he wasn't kidding.

She decided not to point the Russian out to Helen. It might alarm her to think that her own apartment could be under surveillance. Peggy grinned with the sudden thought that Carruthers, on the other hand, would feel slighted if he discovered nobody was assigned to watch *his* comings and goings.

Peggy shivered involuntarily as she left the parlor and ushered Helen into the dining room. "This table easily seats fourteen," she said, her usual happy demeanor returning. "While we have our afternoon tea, we can think about the guest list for the Christmas party. And now, let's take a look at the ballroom."

Helen's eyes widened as she took in the two-story ballroom, encircled on the second floor by an ornate iron balcony. An enormous red and gold Turkish carpet with a floral motif covered most of the floor. Classic round-backed Josef Hoffman chairs interspersed with white and gold drop-leaf tables lined the walls. The domed ceiling was painted with rococo cherubs cavorting among fluffy pink clouds.

"After we have Christmas dinner, can we roll up the rug for dancing?" Helen suggested, her blue eyes shining.

"Of course we can! You can be in charge of bringing over some American records. I've been thinking that what we need is an honest-to-goodness American Christmas party: 'I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas' and turkey with all the trimmings! I packed a Santa outfit in one of those fourteen footlockers we shipped over from the States," Peggy added. "And I'm sure I can persuade Jim to play the part. It's all part of his job of spreading the American way of life, isn't it?" After all, as an undercover agent he should be thrilled to put on a disguise, Peggy added to herself.

Then again, maybe not. Peggy laughed at the thought of her husband parading around in such a conspicuous costume. He was not the James Bond brand of undercover agent. When Peggy had given him the new thriller *Casino Royale* last Christmas, he thanked her but had remarked, "Sweetie, did you forget I don't read fiction?"

Jim was a different kind of spy. While Peggy tooled around in her eye-catching blue station wagon, Jim drove a beige Volkswagen

Beetle. With his gray suits and fedoras, he looked every inch the diplomat. He was always losing his umbrella and gloves and pretended to have trouble with foreign names. When it suited him, he spoke with a stammer. He was very effective.

"Your party idea sounds great!" Helen said with a grin. "CR told me the Commissary just got in a huge order of frozen turkeys and canned sweet potatoes from the military base in Munich. And I'll bring 'Rock Around the Clock,' along with my favorite Frank Sinatra albums," she added.

Peggy took Helen upstairs and showed her the bedrooms with the massive oak bedsteads and wardrobes and then the staircase to the third floor. For the last two months the attic had housed a succession of Hungarian refugee families whom Peggy had plucked out of Traiskirchen.

To Peggy it had made sense for them to take the short streetcar ride from her house in Währing to the Consulate and back. This gave them a warm, dry place to live while they waited for their visas, rather than commuting daily from the camp. The refugees showed their gratitude in different ways. One mother knitted red mittens for all of Peggy's children; a father whittled wooden sheep and cows for a nativity crèche.

Peggy and Helen peered out the window at the back of the master bedroom. The small yard looked very American with its swing set and the sandbox the Gilmans had shipped over from the States. Mostly, though, the four children ignored the equipment and amused themselves with their own games.

Last week they had built a large snowman with a carrot for a nose and pieces of coal from the cellar for eyes and mouth. During the recent thaw, the smile had slumped into a frown. The scarf around the snowman's neck looked suspiciously like the one knitted for Zeke by a refugee who had left last week for Chicago.

"She might as well have taken it with her," Peggy sighed. "Chicago will be even colder than Vienna."

"Oh, but she must have been so grateful that you let her family stay in your attic. I know Jim complains about the cost of coal, but this must be the warmest house in Vienna!" teased Helen.

Peggy grinned. “I really don’t know what he’s so worried about. We get free heat along with free rent. And what would be the use of moving refugees from a freezing camp to a freezing cold attic?” Peggy had no intention of lowering the temperature of the house even when all the refugees had moved out. Central heating was one American luxury Peggy was not about to give up to fight the Cold War.

“It’s funny,” mused Peggy. “For the children, this house is a combination of the castle in *The Princess and the Goblin* and the house on the Clue board. Jane and Wendy are always whispering about secret passages, closets with false panels, and ghosts. They even claim that there’s a dwarf living in the hollow of one of the trees outside. I think they got the idea from that friend of Wendy’s with the very active imagination,” she frowned. “For Jim it’s just a place to grab a few hours of sleep when he isn’t at the Embassy. But for me it’s the most wonderful opportunity to entertain in a way I’ve always dreamed of.”

The two made their way back to the sun parlor, where Frau Mitzi had laid out a spread of strudel and gugelhupf, a delicious raisin-filled cake topped with powdered sugar. Peggy poured herself a cup of tea, a habit she had acquired at her English boarding school, but Helen opted for coffee with whipped cream. They helped themselves to one slice each of the two pastries.

“Oh my goodness,” blurted Helen, as the grandfather clock in the corner of the room chimed three o’clock, “I didn’t realize the time. Tommy and Nancy will be getting off the school bus any minute. Of course the *Kindermädchen* will be at the bus stop to meet them, but I feel guilty if I’m not at the apartment when the kids get there. I’ll just jump on a streetcar and be home in a jiffy.”

She looked rueful as she added, “I know I’m supposed to let Fräulein Inge take care of them, but it’s hard to get used to the idea of maids, let alone governesses for the children. I mean, Mama cleaned house for the rich families of Falmouth, as well as taking care of all of us.”

Then she reddened and added, “Oh, I keep forgetting. CR doesn’t like me to talk about my childhood. He wants me to pretend I’m from the upper crust. Says it’ll help him up the diplomatic ladder.”

"Don't worry; your secret is safe with me," Peggy assured her. "Tell you what, Helen. Let's meet at the Sacher Café Wednesday afternoon right after our work shift at the nursery and plan the party. Be thinking about the guest list. I'll make some preliminary plans."

Helen frowned slightly. "Well, I suppose you have to invite Syd Thornhedge. Please be sure to seat me as far as possible from him. Carruthers won't want to be near him either. CR swears that Syd has it in for him. Of course, Syd has no official influence over him, but you know how much power Syd wields at the Embassy."

Peggy nodded. "Jim thinks Syd's been stationed here a little too long. Six years, isn't it? Station Chiefs have a way of becoming little dictators. There's definitely something to be said for the State Department policy of transferring families every two years. Well, Helen, there must be someone who would be thrilled to sit next to Syd for a whole dinner!"

Helen narrowed her eyes. "Nobody I know. Thanks for the coffee and the tour, Peggy. Now I really have to get going." She took one last bite of the gugelhupf and stood up.

Peggy led Helen back to the vestibule, where Helen's coat was hanging, warm and dry. She threw it on, glancing at herself admiringly in the full-length mirror as she fastened the buttons.

"Peggy, my coat has its old shape back again. It's cinched at the waist, and the collar is standing up on its own. Your Frau Mitzi is an angel! I have no idea how she managed that."

A steam iron and a spray bottle of starch will do wonders to spruce up a wardrobe, Peggy reflected wryly. She wondered how long Helen's coat would keep its elegant look. "You look great, Helen. See you tomorrow!"

The Gilman family is stationed in Vienna, Austria, in 1956, at the height of the Cold War. While Jim works undercover for the CIA at the American Embassy, Peggy spends the Christmas holidays conducting an unofficial murder investigation. She discovers that all of the suspects have hidden depths and will go to great lengths to disguise their pasts-rather like Vienna itself.

Diplomatic Impunity: A Viennese Christmas Mystery