

Phobia Episode 1: Pupaphobia

written by

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FADE IN:

INT. GÜNTER HALL/AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

Vienna, Austria. 1873.

We open inside of a small, quaint theatre. The audience is filled to capacity with smiling, happy families. There are not enough seats for everyone in the theatre to sit down. Many parents are standing at the back of the hall while their children are seated.

The children are smiling and LAUGHING as they watch the stage. Many of them clap their hands and sing in time with the performance.

On stage, a marionette puppet show is unfolding. There are multiple puppets on stage dancing around, but it is clear which one is the lead. None of the other puppets approach the level of liveliness and energy as the one leading the song and dance.

This is the puppet the children are focused on. The puppet is dressed in a swirling long coat that is a patchwork of red and yellow. It is taller than the other puppets and has large blue pins for eyes. He wears a green bycocket on his head, with a large golden flower sticking out from it.

There is small embroidered thread on the puppet's coat. A name. His name. HANS MOUS.

As he sings, they sing. As he dances, they dance. Even some of the parents in the back of the auditorium cannot help but find themselves caught up in the performance.

It is undeniably hypnotic.

The puppet starts to bring his song to a close. He slays the evil witch and rescues the children trapped in her stove. Together, they all sing the final verse of the song before taking a bow.

The curtain draws and the lights within the theatre auditorium slowly flicker back to life. The show is over.

The children in the audience erupt into loud cheers. Some of the younger parents in the back smile and applaud a bit as well.

Several of the children congregate at the front of the stage expectantly. They wait for a beat before chanting out in unison.

## CHILDREN

Hans Mous. Hans Mous. Hans Mous.

The puppet peaks its head out from behind the drawn curtain.

The children erupt in cheers once again. They politely form a circle around the base of the stage. Some of them clap and sing while the puppet dances for them. Others have small pocket books opened to a blank page.

The puppet Hans has black ink on one of his hands. For the children with the pocket books, he walks up to them and places his hand in their book, leaving the imprint of his hand.

The children laugh and cheer with the puppet. His painted on smile seems to almost be growing wider.

The camera shifts focus away from the puppet and up behind the drawn curtains.

Situated in the low rafters above the stage is a puppeteer. His face is covered in sweat as he pulls Hans' strings, making him dance in time with the music and interact with the children.

It is clearly established that the puppeteer is hidden away in the darkness, away from an adoring audience, while the puppet is bathed in the light of the stage.

## INT. GÜNTER HALL/BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

The door to a small changing room slowly swings open. Standing in the doorway is ADALBERT LECHNER(40s), Hans' puppeteer. He is a thin man with heavy bags under his eyes. His face and clothes are drenched in sweat. His gaze seems to drift far away as he slowly shambles into the room.

The changing room interior is simple and spartan. There is a wall length countertop and bench, with a few water basins placed out on the counter. There is a single standing mirror tucked away in a corner of the room.

Adalbert moves his way to the countertop and slumps down onto the bench. There is a top of the line, waterproof travel case on the counter.

Robotically, he carefully puts Hans away in the travel box. He has clearly done this countless times and at this point isn't even watching what he is doing. Even without paying attention, he is still very careful and meticulous about how he handles his puppet.

The smile the puppet Hans had painted on his face while performing is gone. It is now just a simple straight line.

Adalbert stops putting Hans away for a moment. He turns to look at himself in the standing mirror. Slowly, he traces over the grey that is beginning to find its way into his mustache.

MARIONETTIST #1 (O.S.)  
Great show tonight Albert.

Standing in the doorway are two of the other marionettists from the show.

MARIONETTIST #1 (CONT'D)  
We keep this up and we're gonna  
have to move into a bigger theatre.

ADALBERT  
(without looking up from  
the mirror)  
It's Adalbert.

MARIONETTIST #2  
Sorry about that Al. Say, some of  
the crew is getting together  
tonight. Pints out on the town and  
all that. Thought we'd offer and  
see if you wanted to tag along?

ADALBERT  
I'm afraid I can't tonight. I have  
a prior engagement planned for the  
morning. I can't afford to miss it.

MARIONETTIST #2  
You sure? You passed last week too  
and things got pretty wild that  
night.

ADALBERT  
Am I certain I don't want to waste  
my night away with a couple of  
third rate puppeteers who can't hit  
their mark even when it's timed  
with a song, as well as a handful  
of stagehands who can't be bothered  
to install a window so I don't  
suffocate mid performance?  
(Turning to the  
marionettists with a fake  
smile)  
Quite.

MARIONETTIST #1  
The hell you just say?

MARIONETTIST #2  
(stopping Marionettist #1)  
Well, if you say so Al. The boys'll  
all be sad to hear it. Next time  
then?

ADALBERT  
Next time.

The two marionettists turn and walk off.

MARIONETTIST #1 (O.S.)  
The hell we even bother asking that  
uptight bastard for?

MARIONETTIST #2 (O.S.)  
Leave him be. Al's a bit off but  
he's decent enough.

Adalbert returns to putting his puppet away in his case. He stops just short of closing the case, his eyes drawn to the mirror once again.

This time, the reflection he sees in the mirror does not match what we see of him. The reflection is of him as a much younger man, The outfit of his reflection is identical to the outfit the puppet is wearing.

As if in a trance, Adalbert reaches out his hand towards the mirror. The reflection mirrors his movements. Adalbert places his hand on the glass of the mirror.

The reflection reaches out and grabs Adalbert by the wrist. Adalbert jumps back, a look of horror on his face, but the reflection holds him there.

There is a smile on the reflection's face. The same painted smile the puppet wore while it was dancing on stage.

There is a KNOCK at the changing room's open doorway.

Adalbert is startled by the sudden sound of the knocking. The reflection he sees in the mirror once again matches his reality.

ADALBERT  
I told you already, I have other  
plans-

ERNEST

Hopefully you can still spare a few moments for a brief business proposition?

Standing in the doorway is ERNEST(50s), a dapper looking older English gentleman dressed in a well tailored vest.

ERNEST (CONT'D)

(slightly bowing)

Apologies for disturbing your evening. My name is Ernest. I serve as a valet for one Herr Leopold Bergt.

ADALBERT

Bergt? The one buying out all the banks?

ERNEST

His son, actually.

ADALBERT

I see. And what business does the valet of the young Herr Bergt have with me?

ERNEST

Opportunity, Herr Lechner. Opportunity. Though not as infamous as his father, Herr Leopold is quite the prolific investor. One such recent investment was a foray into the art of stage entertainment. You're familiar with das Haus die Aufführung, no?

ADALBERT

Familiar with it? The most prestigious arthouse in Vienna? The only thing more difficult than being chosen to perform on that stage is affording a seat to attend. It's-

ERNEST

Recently under new management. Herr Leopold has many plans for his new venue, one of which includes opening the doors to the general public once more. And to do so, he will need more acts to fill the stage. Acts performed by talented individuals such as yourself.

ADALBERT

Me? I am but a humble children's entertainer.

ERNEST

I would not say a man who has managed to consistently generate enough revenue with each performance to keep this struggling theater afloat for as long as you have is a humble anything Herr Lechner.

ADALBERT

Still, I am but a-  
(Glancing briefly at the puppet)  
He asked for me specifically? Herr Leopold, I mean. He called for my talents by name?

ERNEST

Believe me Herr Lechner, I would not be here had he not. I understand if this request comes as a bit of a shock to you. Do not feel as though you must give a response so immediately. Herr Leopold is hosting a dinner to meet and speak with his new potential tomorrow night. Of course, you are among those invited. I would suggest waiting until then to give a definitive answer.

ADALBERT

Yes of course.  
(extending his hand)  
Thank you for your time Herr-

ERNEST

(Shaking Adalbert's hand)  
Just Ernest is fine. And rather, I should be the one thanking you for your time Herr Lechner. I will send a driver to fetch you shortly before the dinner is set to begin. They will most likely arrive at your domicile around sundown at the latest.

Ernest exits the changing room and walks off down the cramped hallway backstage.

Adalbert lingers in the doorway for a bit, thinking about the exchange he just had. There is a smile growing on his face. He is clearly excited about this opportunity.

Adalbert returns to the countertop and resumes packing away his puppet. He is absentmindedly rehearsing introducing himself as he does so. He is distracted while he works and packs the puppet away sloppily.

The mouth of the puppet is no longer a straight line. It is now curled downward in a displeased grimace.

Adalbert closes the travel case and turns to walk out of the changing room. There is another person leaning up against the doorway, blocking the exit.

The man in the doorway is THOMAS(40s), an overweight American man. His teeth are clamped down on a large cigar. He is holding a stack of banknotes in his hand.

THOMAS

(Counting the banknotes)

You were beautiful out there tonight Bertie. Real beautiful. I mean, the way you had those kids wrapped up in your little puppet strings? A work of art I tell ya'.

ADALBERT

It's Adalbert. Is that tonight's earnings?

THOMAS

Sure is. Great payday too. Was gonna pass these out to everyone after the next practice, but I figure we ain't likely to see you at any of those now are we?

ADALBERT

Very likely not. I would be doing nothing more than wasting my time rehearsing with those amateurs you insist on hiring.

THOMAS

I hear you Bertie, I do. In fact, I'm actually in agreement with ya'. Truly I am. But you know, the problem I'm having here is that when we agreed to this little arrangement of ours, the deal was that you would be here at least four nights a week.

(MORE)



THOMAS (CONT'D)

Now, you're here for the shows when it matters most and that's real good and all, but what about the other nights? It ain't fair to my other performers that you get to stay home, taking it easy and making more than they do, while they're stuck here busting their balls at every rehearsal. With that said-

Thomas counts off a small stack of banknotes. He extends it to Adalbert. Adalbert looks at the stack in confusion.

ADALBERT

Where's the rest of it?

THOMAS

The rest of it? The rest of it stays here with me. That's all of it now.

ADALBERT

You can't be serious. This is an outrage.

THOMAS

Hey, I ain't no performer like you Bertie. What I do ain't open for criticism. You either like it, or you get gone.

ADALBERT

B-but the shows? The kids won't come here without me working that stage. I'm the only one everyone out there keeps coming back to see.

THOMAS

(Laughing)

You? Bertie, baby, ain't one person out there who gives a rat's ass if you're behind that stage or not. Alls any of them care about is if Hans Mous is out there dancing and singing every week.

ADALBERT

That's not ... I-

THOMAS

(patting Adalbert's face  
with the banknote stack)

Listen, Bertie, I like you.

(MORE)

THOMAS (CONT'D)

I really do. That's why I ain't just kicking you out all together. I mean, c'mon. You're only here a fourth of the time I need you to be and you're expecting me to keep your pay the same? I could get some shithead off the street with half your talent at half your new pay. And you know what? He'd be jumping for joy at the opportunity. But I ain't gonna do that to ya'. Cause like I said, I do like ya' well enough there Bertie.

Adalbert tries to protest further but can't find the words. His voice sputters out in indignation.

Hanging his head in defeat, Adalbert snatches the small stack of banknotes from Thomas' hand. He tries to slip past Thomas' large frame in the doorway.

Thomas reaches out and grabs Adalbert by the arm.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

(blowing smoke in  
Adalbert's face)

I'm expecting you here for at least two of the days you signed on for from now on. Otherwise it won't be just your pay that's getting cut.

ADALBERT

I understand. I'll be here.

Thomas smiles and releases his hold on Adalbert's arm. Adalbert slides out of the doorway and storms off down the hallway.

THOMAS

Try not to spend it all in one place.

EXT. MARKET SQUARE - DAY

We open on a semi-busy marketplace. The buildings of the larger shops and banks form a large, square shaped courtyard. There are a few small street vendors selling food and trinkets Up and down the cobblestone roads that intersect through the square.

Adalbert is walking with JOHANNA(40s), a tall blonde with soft features. The two walk closely together down the street. They are clearly comfortable in each other's presence.

Adalbert is carrying a large bag filled with food.

ADALBERT

(indignant)

And then he had the gall to suggest that somehow the performance would be just as great without me pulling Hans' strings. As if I'm not more integral to the performance than a damned puppet is.

JOHANNA

And what did you do?

ADALBERT

Why, I did what anyone would do. I boxed him right between the ears and took what else I was owed.

Adalbert pantomimes like he is boxing. He is still holding the bag with one arm while he does so. He is cutting quite a comical figure.

JOHANNA

(Giggling)

You? Addie, you've never been able to finish a fight without me swooping in to rescue you.

ADALBERT

(Smiling at Johanna)

Ah, but you see I've been practicing in secret. I wouldn't be surprised if I could even take you now.

JOHANNA

Oh?

Adalbert playfully throws a slow punch at Johanna. Johanna easily slips under the punch. She grabs his hand and pulls him close, pinning his arm between their bodies.

Their faces are almost touching.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)

Looks to me like you could still stand to practice a bit more.

ADALBERT

Unless this is exactly how I wanted to end up.

Johanna notices how close their faces are for the first time. She blushes and steps back, releasing Adalbert's hand.

A YOUNG GIRL of about 7 or 8 runs up to Johanna and pulls on her dress, trying to get Johanna's attention. She has the same blonde hair and soft features as Johanna.

YOUNG GIRL

Mama. Mama.

JOHANNA

(kneeling down)

Ja Sonnenblümchen? What is it?

YOUNG GIRL

Papa says he's almost done now and wants to know if we need to buy anything else before we leave.

JOHANNA

Nein, we have everything already.

YOUNG GIRL

What about chocolate? Can we get chocolate?

JOHANNA

(Pretending to think hard)

You want chocolate? Let's see ... have you been doing a good job listening to your Papa today?

The young girls nods her head enthusiastically.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)

(smiling)

Fine. Tell your Papa I said you can get a little chocolate today.

Johanna kisses the young girl on the top of her head and sends her on her way. The young girl skips off excitedly.

ADALBERT

She's grown so much since I've last seen her.

JOHANNA

(Smiling)

Ja. It feels like every time I turn away she's gotten just a little bit older. You know, if you came around more often it wouldn't be so surprising to you every time you saw her.

ADALBERT

Nein, I'm afraid I can't. I'm terribly busy with-

JOHANNA

With what Addie? Rehearsals? You've been performing with that same damn puppet since we were kids. If you haven't mastered it by now you never will. So why can't you come visit us more often?

ADALBERT

I ... you know how it is.

JOHANNA

No, I don't.

ADALBERT

It can be ... difficult.

JOHANNA

Why? What is so difficult about coming and having dinner sometimes?

ADALBERT

Dinner was not what I meant.

JOHANNA

Then what? What is so difficult.

ADALBERT

(After a beat)

Seeing you.

JOHANNA

(Laughing)

Seeing me? Why should that be difficult? We are seeing each other now.

ADALBERT

Nein. Not just seeing you. Seeing you happy. With him. Without me.

They are both silent for a beat.

Adalbert turns his head away in embarrassment. Johanna takes his face in her hands and turns him so he is looking at her.

JOHANNA

That's unfair Addie. What was I supposed to do?

(MORE)

JOHANNA (CONT'D)  
Die waiting for you to find  
whatever it is you've been  
searching for?

ADALBERT  
We were in love.

JOHANNA  
We were young. Little more than  
kids. And you left me. I heard  
nothing from you. Never so much as  
even received a letter. I stayed  
still as long as I could just so  
you would know where to find me  
when you came looking. But you  
never did. And I moved on.

ADALBERT  
I should have written you.

JOHANNA  
(Playfully shoving him)  
You should've done a lot more than  
just write me. Addie, I didn't even  
know you were still alive until  
Emil begged me to take her to that  
show and I saw your name up on the  
marquee. Do you know how that felt?  
You tell me you're leaving to find  
the recognition you so desperately  
craved, only to still be doing the  
very same thing you were doing when  
you were back home? Back with me?

ADALBERT  
Nein ... I am sorry. For a great  
many things.

JOHANNA  
(Gently taking her bag of  
groceries from him)  
I hope you find whatever it is  
you've been searching for this  
whole time. I really do. You  
deserve at least that. But in the  
interim, at least just once, come  
by and meet my family. I would love  
for you to know them.

Johanna turns and starts to walk up the street in the  
direction her daughter skipped away in earlier.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)  
 (turning back towards  
 Adalbert)

And you should bring Hans Mous  
 sometime too. Emil is in enamored  
 with the shows. She would love to  
 meet the man behind it all.

Johanna turns and walks off into the growing crowd.

ADALBERT  
 (to himself)  
 No one cares who's behind the  
 puppet.

Adalbert sighs. He tucks his head down and walks off down the  
 street.

Immediately, he runs right into a YOUNG MOTHER and CHILD who  
 were standing right behind him.

YOUNG MOTHER  
 Ah, sorry.

ADALBERT  
 (steading her)  
 Nein nein, I am sorry. I was not  
 watching where I was going. You are  
 okay?

YOUNG MOTHER  
 Oh ja, just fine. I did not mean to  
 be that close behind you, but I  
 could not help but overhear. Did  
 that woman mention that you were  
 behind the Hans Mous puppet?

ADALBERT  
 Ah, ja well, you know, it is true.  
 I try to keep a small amount of  
 anonymity though when I am out and  
 about, but yes I am the one who  
 puppeteers Hans Mous.

YOUNG MOTHER  
 Oh this is most exciting. Look  
 Henry, this is the man who controls  
 Hans Mous.

CHILD  
 (excited)  
 Hans Mous? Is he here?

ADALBERT

Well no. I keep him in a special case when I am not performing with him.

CHILD

(immediately disinterested)

Oh. Can I go play now?

The young mother nods. The child runs off into the square.

YOUNG MOTHER

I'm so sorry. I really thought he would be more excited than that.

ADALBERT

Not to worry. It is very rare for a child his age to be interested in the work that goes into his entertainment.

YOUNG MOTHER

Still, I cannot help but feel that I've now inconvenienced you in some way.

ADALBERT

Not at all. Even if they aren't always excited to see me, I always enjoy seeing a fan of my work.

YOUNG MOTHER

Then I have a surprise for you, for you've met not just one fan today, but two.

ADALBERT

You as well? I'll admit I am surprised. It is uncommon for me to find fans of my shows that are not children.

YOUNG MOTHER

I used to watch you perform constantly when I was a child. Imagine my pleasant shock to find that you were still doing the same shows I had almost all but forgotten about. And then to be able to show my son something I loved so when I was his age.

The young mother takes Adalbert's hands in her own. The look on her face is deeply grateful.



## YOUNG MOTHER (CONT'D)

I thank you Herr Mous. If not for you I would not have been able to share such a fond memory with my child.

The young mother politely curtsies. She walks off in the direction her son ran off in.

Adalbert stands silently in the street. He watches as people move past him without paying him any mind.

The words the young mother said to him have clearly affected him. It is his first time truly realizing how much time he has put into his puppetry and how little the return has been.

Adalbert walks to one of the stores lining the street and looks at his reflection in the glass of the window. For the first time, he truly notices his age. He quietly traces his fingers along the wrinkles he's developed over the years.

There is a distinct lack of wrinkles or creases near his mouth. Adalbert pulls his lips up in a smile, noting the wrinkles that should be formed from smiling. He releases his lips and traces his fingers over where the laugh lines should be on his face.

For the first time, Adalbert cannot escape the fact that he is unhappy. Unsatisfied with life.

Adalbert looks back out into the growing crowd of people moving about in the street. He sees a version of himself in them, a version of himself who had pursued a different life.

Amongst the crowd he sees a vision of himself, dressed in a well tailored suit, Johanna lovingly by his side. Happy.

Adalbert turns his face away from the vision. A single tear runs down his face as he quietly walks down the street.

## INT. ADALBERT'S HOUSE - DAY/SUNSET

We open in a small and tidy home. It is rather nondescript, with very few if any distinguishing features. The house is designed like a studio flat, with no walls separating rooms from one another.

Everything is well organized and put away. Nothing is out of place.

The only items not currently packed away in a proper place are either on or next to the single bed in the room.

On the bed is a slightly large suit jacket, laid out to be worn, and the puppet Hans Mous. On the floor next to the bed with its lid open is the puppet's travel box.

The puppet is sitting upright on the bed. Its head slowly turns to follow Adalbert as he moves about the room.

Adalbert stands in front of a mirror, trying his best to adjust the shirt and pants he is wearing. They are clearly a size too big on him and he is having to pin it in certain places to make it look better.

Adalbert fuses about with his clothing for a bit before giving up with a huff. He looks at himself in the mirror.

The suit he is wearing is a little bit baggy, but Adalbert has managed to salvage the look for himself. He adjusts his hair a bit before turning his attention to the wrinkles on his face once more.

Slowly and methodically, Adalbert traces his fingers over the lines on his face, taking in his age. He stops as he notices one line just at the edge of his jaw, far more prominent than the rest. He runs his finger along the line.

The line grows as he runs his finger along it, stretching the full length of his profile.

Adalbert pulls at the line, pulling his face with it. Slowly, his face peels away, revealing an empty darkness within him.

Adalbert stands frozen in horror as he gazes into the dark void within himself. His terrified face rests in his hand, bemoaning its fate.

In the reflection of the mirror, a smile can be seen growing on the puppet's face.

There is a loud KNOCK at the door.

The SOUND causes Adalbert to jump in surprise. When he looks back in the mirror, his face is back to normal. He stares at his reflection in a horrified confusion.

We hear another KNOCK at the door.

ADALBERT  
(flustered)  
Just a moment.

Adalbert crosses the length of his house, stopping to collect himself once he reaches the door.

The puppet has fallen back flat on the bed with no expression on its face.

Adalbert opens the door. Standing a few feet away tending to the horses of a carriage is Ernest.

ERNEST

Guten abend, Herr Lechner. I trust that you are ready to go?

ADALBERT

Ah, Ernest. Just a moment.

Adalbert walks back into his house and grabs his suit jacket.

The puppet is knocked to the floor as he does so. Adalbert reaches to pick the puppet up.

THOMAS (V.O.)

Ain't one person out there who gives a rat's ass if you're behind that stage or not.

JOHANNA (V.O.)

Only to find you doing the very same thing you were doing when you were back home?

YOUNG MOTHER (V.O.)

Imagine my pleasant shock to find that you were still doing the same shows I had almost all but forgotten about.

JOHANNA (V.O.)

I hope you find whatever it is you've been searching for this whole time.

Adalbert's hand hovers in place over the puppet. He cannot bring himself to pick it up.

He stands upright, donning his jacket. He looks at the puppet on the floor for a moment before turning away.

Adalbert returns to his open doorway.

ADALBERT

I believe I am ready now Ernest.

ERNEST

Delightful news sir. Come, right this way.

The door to the house closes, leaving the interior illuminated by the flickering light of a dying lantern.

The SOUNDS of a horse drawn carriage ROLLING up the road can be heard from the other side of the door.

On the floor by the bed, the puppet remains in a face down position.

The painted mouth is now curled downward in a fierce scowl.

INT. BURGT MANOR - NIGHT

Burgt manor is a bright and vibrant place. The house is grand in almost every spectacle of the word.

The SOUNDS of REVELRY and LAUGHTER can be heard echoing throughout the halls.

A servant rushes into the resplendent dining hall. They hurry to clear empty plates from in front of the guests seated at the large table. A second servant follows in behind them and refills the guest's glasses with wine.

Seated around the table is an array of about seven people including Adalbert. Each guest is clearly a performer of some sort.

From the eccentric tuxedo wearing MAGICIAN secretly slipping the silverware into his sleeves, to the heavily tattooed FIREBREATHING throwing back wine, to the FORTUNE TELLER hiding her face behind a broken masquerade mask, each guest at the table is more odd and interesting than the last.

All except Adalbert. Adalbert is the only person at the table who appears painfully normal.

Despite his normalcy, Adalbert is clearly a charming presence at the table.

Seated at the head of the table is LEOPOLD(30s), a tall English man with a lithe body. He wears a daring hybrid of a suit and dress that partially exposes his chest. His face is painted with hues of purple and white.

LEOPOLD

(laughing)

I must say Herr Lechner, that is quite the story.

ADALBERT

And it's almost entirely true, I assure you.

FORTUNE TELLER

But what ever happened to the Lady Belle?

ADALBERT

Lost her entire estate in a bad hand of gambling. I hear she's joined a nunnery since then.

MAGICIAN

And the good friar? What of him?

ADALBERT

Ran off with the alter boy to spend their days in a recently acquired estate.

A playful bout of OOHs arise from the table.

MAGICIAN

How marvelously scandalous.

FORTUNE TELLER

Deliciously so.

ADALBERT

If you found that story enjoyable, allow me to tell you the one about the camel that ended a marriage.

LION TAMER

Oh yes do tell, Adenvert..

ADALBERT

It's actually pronounced-

LEOPOLD

I believe it is pronounced Adalbert, no?

Adalbert nods his head in agreement. He is clearly surprised to hear his name pronounced correctly.

LEOPOLD (CONT'D)

I thought as much. Perhaps we'll have you tell your story another time Herr Lechner. As enjoyable as this is, I would hate to have wasted all of your time with simple drinks and dining.

## FIREBREATHER

If this is what you consider simple then I'll have to have you treat me to dinner far more often.

## LEOPOLD

Perhaps we'll be able to make a habit of this then. Assuming you'll all agree to my proposed venture, of course.

Leopold claps his hands and Ernest walks in the room. Ernest places a leather bound stack of papers in front of each diner guest. All except Adalbert.

## LEOPOLD (CONT'D)

Thank you Ernest. As I am sure you are all aware, I've recently come into possession of your Haus die Aufführung. To be blunt, I'm looking for promising talent to fill my stage.

## LION TAMER

Why turn to us then? Aufführung has always played to der Adel. Entertainers like us have always been turned away.

## LEOPOLD

Which is precisely why I was able to purchase it. Your nobility, much like our own, still has a habit of putting on performances that are allowed for their eyes only. Often behind closed doors, away from the public. It feeds their need to feel exclusive. A public theatre designed to cater to that need was near impossible to maintain.

The dinner guests slowly open and peruse through the papers laid out before them.

Adalbert tries to inconspicuously lean over to catch a glimpse of the Fortune Teller's papers. She smiles and winks at him before repositioning her papers to where Adalbert cannot see them.

## LEOPOLD (CONT'D)

My proposal is as follows. Each of you have managed to grab hold of that one thing most crucial to a performer's success.

(MORE)

LEOPOLD (CONT'D)

The attention of the people. That's where the money for us lies; not with the nobility who look down from on high and judge-

MAGICIAN

But with the commonfolk looking for a brief distraction from their hard lives.

LEOPOLD

Precisely. You all have captivated some aspect of the hearts of these commonfolk. Each of you have achieved a level of success of your own accord that I believe we can use to our mutual advantage. If we were to put on a show once a month, with each of us taking one night of the week as a showcase to our talents. Of course this only works if our talents are exclusive to our stage. None of us can moonlight anywhere else.

FORTUNE TELLER

Mutual advantage? Well I certainly see where you benefit in this, having six other performers bring in a constant revenue stream. But what reason would any of us have to agree? I hope you don't take offense, but for those of us making a decent enough living working on our own what benefits us to join?

LEOPOLD

An understandable concern. No offense taken. Certainly there is a bit of risk involved, but I assure you it is a good deal. I would have you all on a payroll, enough to live comfortably enough, and any profits made from your performance are yours to keep. The only money you would part with is a general maintenance due to upkeep our theatre. Please, take a moment to read through those contracts there.

There is some MURMURING as the guests flip through their papers. A few share remarks as they compare the terms in their contracts with one another.

ADALBERT

(addressing Leopold)

Entschuldige Herr Burgt, but it would appear as though I did not receive a contract.

LEOPOLD

Ah yes, Herr Lechner. I apologize. As you are the only one amongst us to currently be employed by someone other than yourself, I wanted to first ask if you were contractually able to leave your current employ.

ADALBERT

(Smiling wryly)

Oh I'm sure they'll find some way to manage without me.

LEOPOLD

That is most wonderful to hear. Ernest?

Ernest places a leather bound stack of papers on the table in front of Adalbert.

ERNEST

For your viewing pleasure sir.

Adalbert excitedly opens his contract. The excitement on his face slowly fades as he flips through the pages, becoming more visibly frustrated as he does so.

ADALBERT

What is this?

LEOPOLD

Your contract? Is there something not to your liking?

ADALBERT

Aside from the fact that the contract isn't written to employ me, but rather for me to sell you Hans Mous?

LEOPOLD

Yes? Apologies, I thought it was apparent why you were asked here.

ADALBERT

Apparently not.



LEOPOLD

Then allow me to explain. Herr Lechner you are in the most unique position of us all here. You are the only one who is not the face of their performance. Unfortunately, what we are selling to the people relies on them recognizing what we put on stage. Hans Mous is perhaps one of the most recognizable children's entertainer in all of Vienna. What I need most expressly is him.

ADALBERT

So then, it wasn't me you actually invited to this dinner.

LEOPOLD

That is certainly a cynical way of viewing this. Of course as his puppeteer I would work with you to keep you on as the one operating him, but in order to play on my stage I would need to contractually own Hans Mous. You would be unable to perform with him anywhere else but where I say.

Adalbert slumps down in his seat.

LEOPOLD (CONT'D)

I understand if this doesn't sound necessarily ideal, but it is a good deal. You would still be entitled to the same benefits as the others. Any money made during your show would be yours to keep. You just wouldn't own the rights to your show or your puppet any longer.

There is a beat of awkward silence.

FORTUNE TELLER

Well I for one am quite pleased with the terms of my contract. Where do you need me to sign?

LEOPOLD

Just right there on the front if you would. And once more on the last page.

The fortune teller signs her name where indicated and slides the papers over to Leopold.

LEOPOLD (CONT'D)

Thank you. I look forward to us performing together soon. As for the rest of you, I don't mean to rush you but this offer extends only as long as the dinner does. Should you decide to refuse it will be forever "off the table", as it were.

(Looking at Adalbert directly)

I need a decision.

INT. ADALBERT'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The front door to Adalbert's house swings open violently.

It is raining heavily outside and the door strikes the wall in time with the sound of distant thunder.

Standing in the doorway illuminated by the streetlamps behind him is a ragged looking Adalbert. His clothes are disheveled and his breathing is heavily labored. He is drenched with rain.

It looks like he has ran here from the dinner.

He fumbles about to light a lantern, lighting up his house.

There sitting upright in a chair facing the door is Hans Mous. His painted mouth is curled up in a smile.

He is sitting in a way that makes it clear he was watching the door, like he knew Adalbert would return for him and he was waiting.

Adalbert notices none of this. His light falls on his puppet and he lets out a sigh of relief. He grabs Hans from the seat and rushes back out the door, into the pouring rain.

EXT. VIENNA STREETS - CONTINUOUS

A worn out looking Adalbert trudges through the streets of Vienna.

He stops running and leans against a street lamp to rest a moment and catch his breath.

The rain is still coming down hard. A fog is starting to roll in.

Adalbert stands there in the mist and rain, desperately trying to catch his breath. He looks up to sky and lets the rain flow down his face.

Hanging limply from his hand is Hans Mous. The rain is ruining his clothes and beginning to seep into his wood.

The painted face is being washed away by the rain. The colors run down the puppet's head, leaving nothing but an empty piece of wood.

Adalbert finds his second wind. He braces himself before taking off into the night once more.

EXT. BURGT MANOR - CONTINUOUS

Most of the lights within Burgt Manor have been extinguished. The atmosphere is far less vibrant and energetic than before.

Burgt Manor has closed for the evening.

The last few remaining dinner guests stumble down the street in opposite directions. The Magician drunkenly HUMS a soft tune as the Fortune Teller helps him find his footing.

Ernest closes the gate to the property. He checks to make sure it is locked before turning towards the manor door.

Adalbert stumbles up to the gate.

ADALBERT  
(panting)  
Ernest! Ernest wait!

ERNEST  
(surprised)  
Herr Lechner? My God. What has become of you?

ADALBERT  
Please. I must speak with Herr Leopold.

ERNEST  
I am sorry Herr Lechner, that is-

ADALBERT  
(Shaking the gate)  
Just bring him out! I must speak with him!

ERNEST

Yes well, as I was saying, young master Leopold is not here. He went to make some arrangements in order to fill the seventh spot for his troupe. He asked me to see to his guests and lock up the manor.

ADALBERT

But ... but I have what he wants. I have Hans Mous.  
(Holds up the puppet)

ERNEST

(Looking from the rain damaged puppet to the man)  
In that condition, I am afraid your Hans Mous would not be worth the investment. I am sorry Herr Lechner. Even if I wanted to help, there is nothing I can do. Young master Leopold made it explicitly clear that the offer lasted only so long, and I'm afraid that window has just concluded.

ADALBERT

But ... but I-

ERNEST

As I said, there's nothing more I can do for you on that front. However we can at least take care of your current condition. As such I insist you come with me in out of the rain Herr Lechner. We can prepare a carriage to take you-

Adalbert slowly walks away from the gate. His head hangs low and his body slumps in shame as he walks.

ERNEST (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Herr Lechner? Please wait a moment.  
Herr Lechner?

EXT. VIENNA STREETS/BRIDGE - CONTINUOUS

Adalbert painfully trundles up the street. He winces with almost every step he takes.

The rain has slowed to a light downpour. The fog however has steadily increased. It is all but impossible to see more than a few feet down the road.

The road turns to a large cobblestone bridge. Adalbert reaches the middle of the bridge and stops walking, taking a moment to rest.

He takes a beat to quietly stand on the bridge and look out over the rest of the sleeping city, reflecting. Only the SOUND of the river RUNNING below stands out.

Adalbert looks down at the ruined puppet in his hands.

ADALBERT

(addressing the puppet)

Well Hans, that was it. That was the chance I had been searching for. A chance to be bigger. And now it is gone. And I am left with nothing. Even you are gone now.

(Sighing)

But you know what? I don't feel distraught. I don't feel anything. I think ... I think this is still a chance, a chance to use what life I have left to make something more concrete for myself.

(Raising the puppet over his head to throw it)

So this is goodbye Hans. I've given you everything I had for far too long, and I have nothing to show for it. Now it is time for us to part ways. I would say auf wiedersehen, but truthfully I never wish to see you again.

Adalbert goes to throw Hans Mous into the rushing river below.

His arm stops mid swing. His body tenses up as all of his muscles are suddenly strained, as if they are being pulled.

Adalbert cannot move.

Hans Mous, currently still raised in the air, slowly turns his blank wooden head to face Adalbert.

There is an unnatural CREAKING sound as the puppet moves of its own accord.

Hans lift one of his arms and Adalbert is jerked back away from the ledge. He moves his hand again and Adalbert lowers him until they are face to face.

The strings that had hung limply from Hans' body are now in his hands being pulled taught.

The strings no longer attach to Hans Mous. He pulls the strings in his hand once more and it is clear the strings are attached to Adalbert.

Adalbert's eyes go wide with horror as he is helplessly trapped in his own body, forced to watch as his puppet now puppets him back up the street towards his house.

INT. GÜNTER HALL/AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

We open inside of a large, posh, velvet lined theatre. The audience is filled to capacity with twisted, nasty faces.

There are not enough seats for everyone in the theatre to sit down. Many of the audience in attendance are standing wherever they can in order to see the show.

The audience is filled with characters that have appeared throughout the episode, all of which now wear a masquarade mask.

From Ernest and Leopold, to the rest of the dinner guests, to Johanna and her family, to even the young mother and her son, every character we've seen before is now raucously LAUGHING and JEERING at the show.

On stage, a marionette puppet show is unfolding. There are multiple puppets on stage dancing around, but it is clear which one is the lead. It is the only puppet on stage that is a person.

Eyes devoid of life and mouth carved upward into a permanently painted smile, forced to dance about the stage in a routine he once puppeteered, is Adalbert.

His performance with the other puppets mimics the routine from the start of the episode, but it is clear that here Adalbert is now playing the character of a fool.

The camera pans up away from the puppet show, behind the curtains and up into the rafters.

Towering over the stage is Hans Mous. He is pulling Adalbert's strings and making him dance.

Hans is still ruined with rain, and it even looks like some of his wood is starting to rot. His face is also still washed away.

On Hans' face, where a painted mouth would normally rest, the wood has cracked and splintered open, revealing an all too human like mouth contorted upwards in a twisted grin.

FADE OUT.

END EPISODE