

“Fifteen; Walter died this morning. Do you always digress like this?”

I was too stunned by the comment to hear the question - sadly, not because of Walter.

“Can you read everyone’s mind?” I asked.

He gave a slight grin, as if to chuckle, but no accompanying sound escaped.

“Only those I’ve studied. When you know a mind well, you can read it as easily as a book.”

“I imagine some books are easier to read than others?”

“I find the level of ease directly proportional to the degree of familiarity; but certainly, some books are more enjoyable than others and so undoubtedly become more familiar.”

For a moment, I wondered if I could continue my part of the conversation in silence. I had only to think my responses, and Durchlauscht might know exactly what they were.

“Perhaps,” he confirmed. “But the amusement lies in what you choose to filter out. As you know, what you think is not always what you say, and what you say....”

“Is this why you came to visit me?”

This time, he did laugh.

“You see, we are already so familiar you have started reading *my* mind. Indeed, I was looking for some entertainment tonight, and you have provided me just that. You are as fine an editor of your thoughts as I have seen. I regret I must leave for another engagement now.”

He rose from his seat, and I stood with him.

“Ihro Majestät-”

He held out a hand to stop me from any displays.

“Perhaps...” he said, with more thought than seemed necessary, “We will meet again.” Then he smiled in a way I could not fully interpret.

In that instant, my German stove seemed to lose its comforting warmth.

But surely I was reading too much into things.