The Hungry Gods Commission a Cathedral

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Rotbier

STADT NÜRNBERG — BAUORDNUNGSBEHÖRDE
Checklist: documents required with a building application (Bauvorlagen)

☐ Application form, signed by the building owner and the design author
☐ Site plan (official extract, scale 1:1000)
☐ Building drawings: floor plans, sections, elevations (1:100)
☐ Building description
☐ Structural verification
☐ Fire safety concept *(special buildings)*
☐ Parking and bicycle space calculation
☐ Statement on monument protection *(where applicable)*

Incomplete applications cannot be processed.

A building application in Nuremberg is complete when it contains everything the checklist says it must contain. I had been a case officer at the Bauordnungsbehörde for two years and two months, and I had never seen one.

They were never bad. They were fine with one thing missing. A site plan with no scale. A fire safety concept for a different building, with the address corrected in pen. The law gives us three weeks to check an application for completeness, and I spent most of every three weeks writing letters that began *We note that the following documents are missing*, and then listing

them, one item to a line, which is the part of my job I am good at.

On Tuesdays, since my first month, my colleague Jule and I walked up the Bergstraße after work to the Hausbrauerei Altstadthof and had one Rotbier each under the copper kettles, among the tourists coming down from the castle. It has been an organic brewery since 1984, and the beer is red and tastes of bread. Jule had one glass and caught the train to Fürth. I usually had a second one alone.

That Tuesday I was on my second when the long table filled up.

* * *

There were seven lanyards and six people.

The lanyards were blue and said NÜRNBERGCONVENTION-CENTER on them in white capitals, which meant something was on at the Messe, which in Nuremberg something always is. The seventh lanyard was hanging on the back of an empty chair with a woman's scarf over it. The six sat down as if they had sat at that table every evening for a week, and the waitress called them by name.

That was how I learned their names. They were the kind of thing you'd call someone if you'd known them a long time and they'd only ever done one job. The waitress asked whether the All-Seeing wanted the same again, and the Conscience-Keeper asked if the bread was extra, so that he would know. Nobody at the next table looked up. In my work you see a lot of names on forms.

They had been at the Messe all morning. Two of them were presenting later in the week. The Allfather, a big man with a beard going grey at the corners, was on a panel on Friday. I listened for what the conference was about and could not tell. It might have been about anything.

The Hand had two lanyards. The second one was from a seminar that afternoon. The All-Seeing asked him what it had been about.

"Load paths," said the Hand, "or leadership."

"Which?"

"There were diagrams," said the Hand, and drank.

* * *

In the afternoon they had walked the churches.

They went through them across the table, the way an inspector goes through a site. St. Sebald and St. Lorenz, the two big Gothic churches that face each other across the river and have been in competition since before either was finished. The Frauenkirche on the market square, which the Emperor Charles IV founded in 1355, the Seeker said. Then the Imperial Chapel at the castle, which is two chapels, one on top of the other, with a gallery where the emperor could hear Mass without having to stand with his household.

"Lutheran since 1525," said the Seeker, of the two big ones. "Both. The year the city decided."

The Hand described the choir vault of St. Lorenz to the table in labour. How many masons, how many summers, how long the scaffolding would have stood.

The All-Seeing said how many people had stood under that vault in the afternoon, and how many of them had looked up. It was most of them. Not all.

The Conscience-Keeper said that the castle had charged him for entry and that the price was fair.

The Chaos-Weaver had not gone into any of the churches. He had gone around them, and now knew where the nearest public toilet was to each one, and the opening hours. Nobody argued that this was less useful.

Then the Allfather put his glass down.

"Two great parish churches," he said. "Built against each other. A church an emperor founded. A chapel an emperor prayed in, upstairs, away from his own people."

He said it the way you'd read an inventory.

Nobody said anything for a moment. The kettles ticked.

"No cathedral," said the Allfather.

"There has never been one," said the Seeker.

"Then the city needs a cathedral," said the Allfather, and picked his glass up again.

* * *

I went on drinking my Rotbier. I also turned round a little on my stool, which I hadn't intended to.

The Chaos-Weaver saw. He let his chair down onto four legs and spoke to the room.

"Does anybody here work for the city?"

There were Americans down from the castle, and a hen party from Erlangen in matching pink T-shirts. None of them worked for the city. I didn't put my hand up.

The Chaos-Weaver looked at me, and then at my chest. I was still wearing my staff pass on its cord: STADT NÜRNBERG, with a bad photograph, and under it, BAUORDNUNGSBEHÖRDE.

"Building," said the Chaos-Weaver.

"I'm off duty," I said.

"Svenja Dorn," said the Seeker. He was reading the pass from across the room. I don't know how. It's small print.

"I'm off duty," I said again, "and you can't."

"Can't what?" said the Allfather.

"Build a cathedral."

"Why not?"

So I told them.

* * *

I told them about land. There is nowhere in the old town to put anything, and outside it somebody already owns every square metre.

The Conscience-Keeper had taken a notebook out of his jacket. It was black, with an elastic band. He wrote something in it.

I told them about planning. You can't put a building of that size where the land-use plan says meadow without the city council changing the plan, and the council does not change the plan in a week, or a year, if it can help it.

He wrote that down.

I told them about monument protection. The old town is a protected ensemble, and under it the ground is a monument too, every cellar, and you can't put a spade in it without a permit and an archaeologist.

He wrote that down.

I told them about parking. So many spaces per seat.

He wrote that down.

"And money," I said. "It'll cost more than you can imagine."

The Allfather's phone rang.

It rang the way an old phone rings, a real bell, and the hen party turned round. He stood up and went outside, and through the window I could see him on the cobbles with his back to us and the phone to his ear, under the street lamp, not saying very much.

I did not ask who it was. I want to be clear that I did not ask. Nobody at the table asked either. The Hand ordered another beer.

The Allfather came back in after four minutes and sat down.

"Funding is not the question," he said.

The Conscience-Keeper crossed something out in his notebook. I could see the line. It was the line that said *money*.

"Then what is the question?" said the All-Seeing.

They all looked at me.

"Everything else," I said. "Land. Planning. Monuments. Parking. Fire safety. Structural. Water, if you're near the river. You'd need an application. A complete one. Every document on the list."

"Is there a list?" said the Conscience-Keeper.

“There’s a list.”

“May we have it?”

“No,” I said. “I’m off duty. Come to the counter. Bauhof 5. We open at half past seven.”

That was the first time I said no to them. I remember it because it was the first time it made no difference.

The Seeker was holding up his phone. On the screen was the checklist from the city’s website. He passed it down the table to the Conscience-Keeper, who copied it into the notebook, box by box, under my objections.

“Thank you,” said the Conscience-Keeper. “That is very helpful indeed.”

I finished my Rotbier. I want to say that I left then. I didn’t.

The Crawl

(beer mat, Tucher Mautkeller — reverse side, pencil)
WÖHRDER WIESE — flat — nobody on it after dark
river ~~~~~~~~ (goes through)
→ BRIDGE → ANSBACH
SEATS: 1
SPONSOR: ✗
(second hand, smaller) toilets: Marientor ✓

I went with them to stop them. I went the way you'd go with a man who has said he is going to drive home, and I told myself so on the Bergstraße, and by the Hauptmarkt I had stopped telling myself anything because I was trying to keep up.

The Chaos-Weaver had decided the route. Every time we arrived somewhere it turned out to be on the way to somewhere else.

We went past the Frauenkirche, dark now, and over the river to the Hallplatz, and down the steps into the Mautkeller.

* * *

The Mautkeller is under the old customs hall. It has been a cellar since 1498, a long white vault on sandstone pillars as

thick as a car, and it was full of a company outing from a medical-devices firm who had reached the stage of the evening where they were singing.

“Five hundred and fifty,” said the All-Seeing, sitting down.

“Seats?” said the Hand.

“Seats.”

The Hand looked up at the vault the way he had looked at St. Lorenz. He put his hand flat on the nearest pillar. “This would do,” he said.

“It’s a pub,” I said.

The Conscience-Keeper asked for the manager. The shift manager came, with a tea towel over his shoulder and the look of a man who had already dealt with the medical-devices firm once tonight. The Conscience-Keeper explained that they were proposing to build a cathedral in Nuremberg, that funding was in place, and that they were seeking a corporate partner from the city’s brewing tradition, to be acknowledged on a plaque in the narthex.

“In the what?” said the manager.

“The porch,” said the Seeker.

“Not the name,” said the Conscience-Keeper. “The cathedral would not be named after a beer.”

The manager said he would have to ask. He said the people he would ask would ask him one question first, and he could tell us now what it was. He folded the tea towel.

“Without the name,” he said, ”no.”

The manager sent over a round anyway, for the idea. The medical-devices firm started on a song I didn't know, about a miller.

* * *

It was at the standing table by the stairs, on the way out, that they decided where.

The All-Seeing said it. East of the walls, where the Pegnitz comes into the old town: the Wöhrder Wiese. A long mown meadow between the old town and the lake. In summer it was full of people lying on blankets. In October, after dark, it was empty.

"Flat," said the Hand.

"Nobody on it after dark," said the All-Seeing.

The Seeker took a beer mat and drew the meadow on the back of it, with the river through the middle, because the river goes through the middle of it.

The Chaos-Weaver leaned over.

"It's on both sides of the river," he said.

"Yes."

"So you'd need a bridge."

"Yes."

"A bridge means Ansbach," said the Chaos-Weaver.

He said it the way you'd say that rain means umbrellas. Ansbach is where the government of Middle Franconia sits, forty minutes away on the train. The Seeker wrote BRIDGE on the beer mat, and an arrow, and ANSBACH.

I didn't correct him, because I didn't know. I am a building officer. I don't do bridges.

"Show me," said the Allfather.

So the Chaos-Weaver took us there.

* * *

Gostenhof, where he said we were going, is west of the old town, and the Wöhrder Wiese is east of it, and he took us east. We came out through the Marientor onto the meadow and stood in the dark, six of them and me, with the river going past somewhere in front, and you could smell the cut grass and the water.

The Hand walked out a little way onto the grass and stood there.

"Here," he said.

Nobody argued. The Conscience-Keeper wrote. The Allfather stood with his hands in his coat pockets for a long time, and then turned round and looked at the two spires of St. Lorenz over the wall, and said nothing at all.

"Toilets," said the Chaos-Weaver, pointing, "are by the gate."

Then he took us west.

* * *

We crossed the old town end to end, out past the Plärrer, where the trams come together, and into Gostenhof. It took nearly an hour. Nobody suggested the U-Bahn. I didn't either. It had

occurred to me that I would rather hear the rest of this than read it on a form.

The Schanzenbräu is a neighbourhood pub on the Adam-Klein-Straße, with a shelf of children's books by the door. The beer is red, or pale, or dark, and the Hand had all three, in that order.

The Conscience-Keeper asked for the manager. It went the same way, more kindly. The man behind the bar shook his head before the Conscience-Keeper had finished saying no.

"It's a lovely idea," he said. "Without the name, though."

The Chaos-Weaver said, from the end of the table, that in the old days the monasteries brewed their own beer, and that a cathedral could brew its own beer, and then there would be no need for a sponsor. The Conscience-Keeper wrote it down. Then he looked at it. Then he drew a line through it.

"Not a requirement," he said.

"No," said the Chaos-Weaver, pleased, as though that had been the point.

* * *

At half past ten the door opened and a woman came in out of the street with a folder under her arm.

She was in her fifties, I thought, in a green coat, with her hair tied up. She walked straight to the long table and the Hand moved his chair and she sat down in the gap as if there had always been a gap there, and the Hand took a blue lanyard out of his jacket pocket, the one from the empty chair at the Altstadthof, and gave it to her, and she put it on.

The waitress said, “Same again, Companion?”

“Please,” said the Companion. She put the folder on the table. “I’ve been round the corner.”

Round the corner was the Denisstraße, where the Internationales Frauen- und Mädchenzentrum has its rooms. The IFMZ has been there since the late seventies, running language courses and counselling and holiday programmes for women and girls who have come to Nuremberg from everywhere. The Companion had spent her evening there instead of at the Messe. Nobody asked why.

In the folder was a letter. One page, on IFMZ letterhead, signed by the chair of the association, in support of the construction of a cathedral on the Wöhrder Wiese.

The Allfather read it and handed it to the Conscience-Keeper, who read it twice and put it in the notebook behind the elastic.

“Why?” said the Seeker.

“Some of the girls sing,” said the Companion. “They want a room where it comes back to them.”

Nobody said anything for a moment. Then the Hand said, “The vault will do that,” and the Companion said, “That’s what I told them,” and drank her beer.

The letter was dated that day. Under the signature there was a time, which some associations put on their letters and most don’t. It said 21:40.

I asked one question. It is the question I ask everybody at the counter, because everything else depends on it.

“How many seats?”

“One,” said the Allfather.

I waited for him to correct it. He didn't. I assumed one of us had misheard. The Conscience-Keeper had already written it down.

* * *

It was twenty past midnight when I got home. I had told Jule I would be in bed by ten. In the morning I found the beer mat in my coat pocket, and I did not know how it had got there, and I put it in my desk drawer at work, under the stapler, where I keep things I am not ready to file.

Vollständig

STADT NÜRNBERG — BAUORDNUNGSBEHÖRDE
Acknowledgement of receipt: building application

Received: Wednesday, 07:30, at the counter
Project: New construction of a cathedral, with pedestrian bridge over the Pegnitz
Site: Wöhrder Wiese (parcel as shown on official site plan, Annex 2)
Classification: Special building (place of assembly)
Fixed seats: 1
Building owner: the Allfather *(signed 08:20)*
Design author: the Hand *(chamber registration verified)*
Case officer: Dorn

The Conscience-Keeper was at the door at twelve minutes past seven.

I saw him from the tram stop, outside Bauhof 5, with a cardboard archive box held in front of him in both hands, the way people carry a cake to a party they are not sure they were invited to. The counter opens at half past seven.

“Good morning, Frau Dorn,” he said.

“Good morning.”

“I hope we’re not too early.”

“You’re not anything,” I said. “We’re not open.”

At half past seven the porter unlocked the door and he put the box on my counter, square to the edge, and took the lid off.

* * *

This is what was in it. It took me three and a half hours to go through, and I went through it the way I go through all of them, from the top, with a ruler.

The application form. Signed by the design author, the Hand, with his registration number from the Bavarian chamber, which I checked, and which was valid. The owner's line was empty.

I turned the form round and put my finger on it. The owner's line needs a person, natural or legal, who is answerable in law for everything the building does from the day it is begun.

"The funding," said the Conscience-Keeper, "comes from someone who does not wish to be named."

"Then that person can't be the owner."

He nodded slowly, as if this was a principle he had held for a long time and was glad to see applied, and went to the bench by the window and phoned the Allfather. He said, "The owner's line," and, "Yes," and, "She's right," and hung up.

The Allfather came at twenty past eight, on his way to the Messe, with the Hand, who was wearing a lanyard from a different seminar. He read the form from the top, every line, the way I would want anybody to read a form, and took my pen and signed in the box marked *Building owner*. It was the first legible signature I have ever seen on an application. Frau Kessler at the next desk said, later, that it looked printed.

“You understand,” I said, “that you’re now responsible. Personally. For everything.”

“Yes,” said the Allfather, and gave me back my pen, and went to his conference.

Then I went on.

The official site plan, at 1:1000, with the new building drawn in red where the Hand had stood in the dark.

The building drawings, at 1:100. A nave. Aisles. A crossing. A choir. A west front with two towers.

The building description. It was the right length. I didn’t know there was a right length until I read it.

The structural verification, by an engineer in Fürth I had dealt with before, who had never before submitted anything on time.

A fire safety concept for a special building, with escape routes, exit widths, and an occupancy calculation for a congregation that, according to page four, would stand.

The parking calculation.

A statement on monument protection, and an application for a monument-law permit for the ground works, addressed to us, since we are also the Lower Monument Protection Authority, two doors down.

An application to the Umweltamt for an exemption to build in the flood area of the Pegnitz. I had not said flood area on Tuesday. I hadn’t thought of it. It was in the box anyway, in its own folder, with a note asking whether we would be kind enough to forward it.

And a sheet headed *Ownership of the site*, which said that the building owner did not own the Wöhrder Wiese, which belonged to the city, and that under the Bavarian building code a permit is issued without prejudice to the private rights of third parties. Which is true. A permit says you may build. It does not say where you may stand while you do it.

I had said land, on Tuesday night. Land was the first thing I had said. I read the paragraph twice. It was correct.

* * *

At the back of the box, in a clear plastic sleeve, was a photocopy of a page from a black notebook.

At the top were my objections from the Altstadthof, one to a line. *Land. Planning. Monuments. Parking. Money* (crossed out). *Fire. Structural. Water.* And underneath, copied from the city's website, the checklist, box by box. Beside each line, in the margin, a number. The number was the annex where that objection had been answered.

The annexes were in the order I would have put them in, if anybody had ever given me all of them.

I looked up. The Conscience-Keeper was sitting on the bench by the window with his hands on his knees.

"Is something missing?" he said.

"I don't know yet."

"Please take your time."

* * *

At a quarter past ten I went down the corridor and knocked on Herr Gebhardt's door.

Herr Gebhardt has run our section for twenty-two years. He has seen a petrol station built on a cemetery and an application for a garden shed signed by a dog. He was eating a pretzel at his desk.

"I have a complete application," I said.

He put the pretzel down.

He came down the corridor with me and looked into the box, and then at the Conscience-Keeper on the bench, who stood up. Herr Gebhardt unrolled the drawings on the counter and held the corners down with his hands and looked at the west front for a long time.

"A cathedral," he said.

"Yes."

"On the Wöhrder Wiese."

"Yes."

"With a bridge."

"Yes."

Herr Gebhardt let the drawings roll themselves back up. He asked Frau Kessler if there was coffee, and she brought him one, and he held it, and he didn't drink it. When I picked it up off the counter at lunchtime it was still full.

"In twenty-two years," he said to me, quietly, "I have never had one."

"I know."

“Is it real?”

“It’s complete,” I said. “That’s all I can say.”

* * *

The law gives us three weeks to check an application for completeness. I finished at twenty to twelve.

When an application is incomplete, we write a letter, and until the applicant answers it nothing happens. The letter is the brake. The letter is how a building office breathes. When an application is complete, there is no letter. The other departments have to be heard, and the process starts, and the case officer goes with it.

“Then hear them,” said Herr Gebhardt, when I told him it was complete. “All of them.”

“The internal post takes three days.”

He thought about it.

“Then walk it round,” he said. “Tomorrow.” He looked at the box. “I’ll tell them you’re coming.”

* * *

There was one more thing. The form has a field for fixed seats, for the parking and the fire safety. The field said 1.

I took a pencil and drew a circle round the 1. Lightly. You are allowed to mark an application in pencil, and I wanted a sign that I had seen it, in case anybody later asked.

Then I took the stamp, the receiving stamp, the one with the date, and inked it on the pad, and stamped the receipt, and signed it, and gave the Conscience-Keeper his copy.

It was an ordinary stamp. I have stamped thousands. It came out square, and slightly darker at the top, because the pad is old.

The Conscience-Keeper folded his copy once and put it in the black notebook, behind the elastic, next to the letter from the IFMZ.

“Thank you, Frau Dorn,” he said. “Until tomorrow.”

What Lies Under the Meadow

STADT NÜRNBERG — BAUORDNUNGSBEHÖRDE (UNTERE DENKMALSCHUTZBEHÖRDE)
Application for a permit under monument law (Art. 7 DSchG): ground works

Location of works: Wöhrder Wiese
Registered ground monument: ☐ Yes ☐ No ☒ Not known
Suspected archaeological area: ☐ Yes ☐ No ☒ Not known
Nature of ground intervention: *foundations (piled); bridge abutments (2); services*
Supporting documents: *Provenance of the site (Seeker), with sources; gaps marked as gaps*

At two o'clock the Seeker came to the monument desk, two doors down from mine, with a ring binder, and asked for Frau Haas.

Frau Haas is the city's archaeologist for permits. She has worked under the old town for twenty years. She keeps a photograph of a medieval latrine on her pinboard because, she says, it was the most complete thing she ever dug. I sat in, because the monument permit was in my box.

The Conscience-Keeper came too. He sat in the corner with the notebook on his knee and said nothing for an hour.

* * *

"Every ground intervention in the old town needs a permit," said Frau Haas. She said it before anybody had sat down. "The old town is a ground monument. All of it. Every cellar."

"The Wöhrder Wiese is outside the walls," said the Seeker.

"Then it depends whether it's registered."

"It isn't."

"Or a suspected area."

"Not known," said the Seeker. He turned the binder round and showed her the form, where he had ticked *Not known* in both boxes. "Which is why I've applied."

"Most people tick no," said Frau Haas.

"I don't know that it's no."

"No," said Frau Haas, "you don't." And she sat down.

* * *

The binder was not a history of the meadow. The Seeker called it *what is on record*. It was in order by date, one item to a page, with the source at the bottom in small type, and where he did not know something there was a page anyway, with the dates at the top and the word *Gap* in the middle, and nothing else.

There were a lot of gaps. Nobody writes about a meadow until somebody wants to build on it.

Before the lake, he said, the river came through here in two arms, across a flood plain, and flooded, often. In 1959 the council decided to make the Wöhrder See upstream, and from the late sixties to the early eighties they built it, for flood

protection, and to tidy up what the war had left in the meadows further east. Whether the war had left anything in this meadow was a gap. The page said *1943–1945* at the top, and *Gap*.

"We'll need the explosives people," said Frau Haas.

"I've written to them," said the Seeker. He turned to a page with a copy of the letter on it.

Frau Haas looked at the letter. Then she pulled her keyboard over and began to check.

* * *

She checked them properly. The first footnote was correct. The second. A council resolution from 1959 was in the city archive's catalogue under the number he had given, and she said, "Hm," and checked the next one. And the next.

By the eighth she had stopped looking for a mistake and was just reading.

"Where did you find this?"

"The city archive," said the Seeker. "Your library. The survey office. The water authority's published reports. Some newspapers." He paused. "And one parish register, for the eighteenth century, which I could not read all of. I've marked the part I couldn't read."

He had. There was a page with a photograph of a register entry, in brown ink, and under it a transcription, and in the middle of the transcription a run of square brackets, and inside the brackets, *illegible*.

Frau Haas looked at the square brackets for a while.

“Most people,” she said, ”guess.”

“I know,” said the Seeker.

* * *

At twenty to three he looked at his watch and stood up.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “I’m presenting at three.”

“Now?” said Frau Haas.

“At the Messe. I’ll be back by half past four.”

“What are you presenting?”

The Seeker thought about how to answer this. “Sources,” he said, and went.

We went on without him.

Near the back there was an earlier page. The date at the top was *1015*. It was not about the meadow. It was the year the city passed from the diocese of Eichstätt to the new diocese of Bamberg, and the page said only that, and the source, and underneath it the Seeker had written, in pen, small:

Since then, under someone else’s.

“What does that have to do with the meadow?” said Frau Haas.

“I don’t know,” I said. I didn’t. Frau Haas checked the source. It was correct.

* * *

He came back at twenty-five to five and opened the binder where Frau Haas had stopped and said, “Where were we?”

I asked him how the presentation went.

"Well," he said. "They asked about the gaps."

At ten to five the Conscience-Keeper's phone buzzed. He looked at it, and listened, and said, "Yes," and, "I'll write it down," and wrote something down.

"The Companion," he said, to the room. "From the IFMZ. They would like the foundation stone to carry the names of the women who build the cathedral."

Frau Haas said that this was a lovely idea.

"Which women?" said the Seeker.

The Conscience-Keeper checked. "It doesn't say."

"Then we'll need to find out," said the Seeker, and made a page for it in the binder, and wrote at the top of it *Names (foundation stone)*, and in the middle of it, *Gap*.

* * *

Frau Haas issued the permit at five past five, with conditions. She wrote them by hand first, on a pad.

An archaeologist on site for all ground works.

For every pile.

Every one.

"There'll be a lot of piles," I said. "It's on a flood plain."

"Then they'll need a lot of archaeologists," said Frau Haas. "Or one, for a long time." She looked at the Seeker. "And clearance from the explosives people before anybody puts anything in the ground at all. Not after. Before."

"Of course," said the Seeker.

“And if anything turns up—“

“It stops. I know.” He closed the binder. “I’d rather it stopped.”

* * *

The Hand came to collect them at a quarter past five. He had come from the Messe, and he had a fourth lanyard, and he stood in the doorway of Frau Haas’s office with his hands in his pockets while the Seeker explained the conditions.

“An archaeologist on every pile,” said the Seeker.

The Hand considered this.

“Good,” he said.

Frau Haas looked at him. Everybody says *every pile?*, and then they say it again, louder, and then they ring their lawyer.

“Somebody else watching the ground,” said the Hand. “That’s good.”

They went. Frau Haas typed up the conditions and went back to the file she had been working on before two o’clock, which was a garage.

Umlauf

PARKING AND BICYCLE SPACE CALCULATION
(Parking Bylaw of the City of Nuremberg, table of standard values, no. 4: places of assembly; churches, mosques, synagogues)
Basis: fixed seats (SP) 1
Car spaces: 1 per 30 SP ..... 1 ÷ 30 = 0.033
Bicycle spaces: 1 per 25 SP ..... 1 ÷ 25 = 0.04
Required (rounded): _____ car _____ bicycle
Applicant's figures, Annex 7: 1 car / 1 bicycle (shown on site plan, beside the porch)

On Thursday I walked the file round the city.

Herr Gebhardt had phoned ahead and told every department that the case officer would be coming that morning with the file under her arm, and would wait.

"Will they mind?" I asked him.

"Yes," said Herr Gebhardt. "Wear comfortable shoes."

* * *

Planning first, because planning is always first.

Herr Wolf in urban planning has a desk by a window that looks at a wall, and on the wall outside the window somebody has painted, very small, in white, a bird. He says he doesn't

know who. I have known him for two years and I think it was him.

He read the request in Annex 19, which asked the city council to begin a development plan for the Wöhrder Wiese, and which had been delivered to the council office by hand on Wednesday at half past four.

"The land-use plan," he said, "says meadow."

"I know."

"To build on a meadow you need a development plan. A development plan takes two years. Sometimes three. There are hearings. There's a public display. People write in. People write in about a bicycle rack."

"I know."

"So this can't be done by Friday."

"Herr Gebhardt says it can."

Herr Wolf looked out of the window at the bird.

"That's not how plans work," he said.

"No," I said. "But the file's complete."

He was quiet for a while. Then he wrote his statement in the box for the planning department and signed it. I read it on the stairs. It said that the project depended on the council, that the council's planning committee would consider the matter that afternoon, and that the department had no objection to the committee considering it.

Underneath, smaller, he had written: *Not how plans work.*

* * *

Parking is in our own building, one floor down, and it is Herr Pöhlmann.

Herr Pöhlmann has done parking for thirty years. Every time the bylaw is amended he laminates the new table and pins it over the old one, so that there are several layers by now, and the one on top is August 2025.

Frau Kunz from traffic planning was already there. Herr Gebhardt had phoned her too. She had brought her own calculator.

"Assembly," said Herr Pöhlmann, reading the form. "Number four."

"Since last August," said Frau Kunz, "number four is churches together with everything else. Theatres. Concert halls. Multipurpose halls. Cinemas. School assembly halls. Lecture halls. Mosques. Synagogues."

"I know what number four is," said Herr Pöhlmann. "I laminated it."

"One car space per thirty seats."

"One bicycle space per twenty-five."

They both looked at the field on the application where the seats went. They both looked at my pencil circle round the 1.

Frau Kunz did it on her calculator anyway. "Nought point nought three three."

"Nought point nought four," said Herr Pöhlmann, for the bicycles, without a calculator.

"Then it rounds to nought."

"It rounds to one."

“Nought point nought three rounds to nought. That’s what rounding is.”

“In parking,” said Herr Pöhlmann, “we round up.”

“Since when?”

“Since always. You can’t have three hundredths of a car.”

“You can’t have one car for one chair either.”

“You can,” said Herr Pöhlmann, “if the table says so.”

“The table says one per thirty.”

“Of which there is one.”

“Of which there is one thirtieth.”

I sat down. There is a chair for applicants. I had never sat in it before.

They went on for twenty minutes. Frau Kunz said that if a cathedral with one seat needed a car space then so did a cinema with one seat, and she would like to see the cinema. They looked at the fire safety concept. It said *place of assembly*, and under it, *standing congregation*.

“Then it’s assembly,” said Herr Pöhlmann.

“Standing,” said Frau Kunz, “isn’t seats.”

“The table,” said Herr Pöhlmann, “is seats.”

“Then the standing ones don’t count.”

“Then the standing ones don’t count.”

They stopped. It was the first thing they had agreed on, and they didn’t like where it had taken them.

“So it’s one seat,” said Frau Kunz, “and a congregation that doesn’t exist for the purposes of parking.”

“For the purposes of parking,” said Herr Pöhlmann, “the congregation is the chair.”

Frau Kunz looked at the ceiling.

"Up," she said.

"Up," said Herr Pöhlmann.

"One car space."

"One bicycle space."

Then I showed them Annex 7.

It was the site plan by the porch, enlarged. There was one car space drawn on it, two and a half metres by five, with a P in it, and next to it a bicycle stand with a bicycle in it. The bicycle had been drawn with some care. It had a bell.

Herr Pöhlmann looked at it for a long time.

"They rounded up," he said.

"Before you did," I said.

Frau Kunz put her calculator back in her bag. She didn't say anything. On the way out, she stopped at the door and said, "It's a nice bicycle," and went.

Herr Pöhlmann signed. He wrote *1/1, rounded up, agreed with applicant*. Then he took his laminated table off the wall, all the layers at once, and looked at the bottom one, which was from 2007, and put them back.

* * *

Fire safety was a tram ride away, at the fire brigade, and Herr Ochs, who read the concept with his finger and stopped at page four.

"Standing," he said.

"Standing."

"The congregation stands."

"That's what it says."

He worked out the capacity by floor area, which is how you do it when there are no seats, and checked the exits. They were wide enough. Then he stopped at the choir.

"This door opens inwards."

I looked. It did. The small south door of the choir was drawn with its swing into the building.

"Exit doors open outwards," said Herr Ochs. "Everybody knows that." He wrote it on a yellow sticky note and stuck it to the drawing. It was the first thing in the file that was wrong. He did not seem surprised. Then he leaned back.

"Which church in Nuremberg," said Herr Ochs, "has everybody standing?"

I thought about it. I was baptised at St. Johannis. I have been to Christmas at St. Lorenz and a wedding at St. Sebald, and in all of them there were pews, and people sat in them, and complained about them.

"I don't know one," I said.

"Football," said Herr Ochs. "Football stands." He signed, subject to the door. "This is for football."

* * *

While I was on the tram back, the objection arrived by courier. The letterhead said *Joint Committee of the Old Town Churches*, which I had never heard of, and which had been formed on Wednesday evening for the purpose. It was long and well written and signed by a retired pastor, and it made four points, and I logged them, one to a line.

That the old town already had churches, many of them, and that many of them were not full on Sunday.

That a cathedral is the church in which a bishop has his seat, and that there was no bishop to seat.

That Nuremberg's churches were what the Reformation had made of them, here, first, in 1525, and that a cathedral on the Wöhrder Wiese would be, whatever its builders intended, a statement about that.

That the Wöhrder Wiese belonged, in summer, to the people lying on it.

The second point was not a building matter. Bishops are not in the building code. I logged it anyway, because it was in the letter, and everything in the letter goes in the log.

* * *

I was back at my desk at eight minutes to one, with every department on my morning list signed, and one yellow note.

I squared the file and ate my sandwich, which was cheese. Frau Kessler asked me how it had gone, and I said one car space, one bicycle space, a standing congregation, and four objections, one of which was about a bishop.

"A bishop?" said Frau Kessler.

"It's not a building matter," I said, and finished my sandwich.

The Hundred-Year Flood

STADT NÜRNBERG — UMWELTAMT (LOWER WATER AUTHORITY)
Site visit record: application for exemption, construction in the designated flood area of the Pegnitz

Date: Thursday, 14:00. Location: Wöhrder Wiese
Present: Brunner (Umweltamt); Dr. Lindner (Wasserwirtschaftsamt Nürnberg); Dorn (Bauordnungsbehörde); for the applicant: the All-Seeing, the Hand
Basis: designated flood area, Pegnitz (city ordinance, 1979); design flood HQ100
Note: *Construction in the flood area is prohibited in principle. Exemptions only in individual cases.*

At half past one the Chaos-Weaver came to the counter with two train tickets to Ansbach.

He put them on the counter side by side. One was for him. The other one had my name on it.

"The bridge," he said. "The train's at thirteen forty-seven."

I had looked it up on Wednesday night at the kitchen table, because I had lain awake thinking *a bridge means Ansbach*, and I had wanted to know if it was true. It wasn't.

So I told him. The Pegnitz there is a first-order water, a state river. Anything built within sixty metres of its bank needs a permit under the water law, from the district authority, which

in Nuremberg is the city. And if the thing also needs a building permit, the water-law permit is folded into it. You get it from me.

"So the bridge," I said, "is in my file. It doesn't go to Ansbach. A private footbridge never goes to Ansbach. Ansbach is for roads."

The Chaos-Weaver looked at the tickets.

"They're non-refundable," he said.

"I'm sorry."

"Ansbach is lovely," said the Chaos-Weaver. He had never been. He picked up both tickets and put them in his coat. "I'll tell you about it."

* * *

The real problem with the bridge was not the bridge. It was the meadow.

The Pegnitz has a designated flood area. The city fixed it by ordinance in 1979, from the eastern city boundary to the western, around the land that would be under water in a hundred-year flood. Inside the line, you may not build. There are exceptions, and the Umweltamt grants them, one at a time, and it had called a site visit for two o'clock, on the meadow, because that is where the water would be.

* * *

It was cold and bright. A man was doing push-ups by a bench. Frau Brunner from the Umweltamt had a map in a plastic sleeve

and wellingtons. Dr. Lindner from the state water office on the Allersberger Straße had a tablet and good shoes he was worried about. The All-Seeing had nothing. The Hand had a tape measure.

Frau Brunner held the map up against the meadow. The line went across the site. The western end of the nave was inside it, and the choir was outside it, and the crossing was on the line.

"So it's half in," said the Hand.

"It's in," said Frau Brunner. "If any of it's in, it's in."

Dr. Lindner explained the hundred-year flood, which he does, he told me, about twice a week, usually to people who have bought a house. It is not a flood that comes once every hundred years. It is a flood big enough that, in any one year, the chance of it is one in a hundred. It can come twice in a decade. People hear *a hundred years* and think they are safe until their grandchildren's time, and then it comes in March.

"I always get asked the same question," he said. "Will it flood while I live here."

"How long will the building stand?" the All-Seeing asked the Hand.

"Eight hundred years," said the Hand. "If they look after it."

The All-Seeing nodded.

"Over a hundred years," he said to Dr. Lindner, "the chance that at least one flood that size comes is about two in three. Sixty-three in a hundred. Over eight hundred years, the chance that it doesn't come is about three in ten thousand."

Dr. Lindner took his tablet out and did it. It took him a minute. He looked up.

“That’s right.”

“So it will flood,” said the All-Seeing.

“Yes.”

“I can’t tell you which year.”

Dr. Lindner lowered the tablet.

“Nobody can,” he said.

“No.”

“Every week,” said Dr. Lindner, “somebody asks me which year. Every week I say I can’t tell them, and every week they look at me as though I’m keeping it from them.” He put the tablet away. “Thank you.”

“It’s only the arithmetic,” said the All-Seeing.

* * *

Then there was the river itself.

We walked down to the bank. The Pegnitz is not wide there, brown and quick. On the far side, under a willow, the river had cut a steep earth bank into the meadow.

“Kingfisher,” said Frau Brunner.

The kingfisher is protected under European law. It nests in steep earth banks, in a tunnel it digs itself, and in the breeding season, which on the Pegnitz runs until the middle of July, the canoe clubs are kept off parts of the river.

“Is there a nest there?” I asked. It was the bank where the bridge would land.

They all looked at the All-Seeing, though he was the applicant’s man, not ours.

“I know how many pairs there are on the river through the city,” he said. “Roughly how many to a kilometre. Where they like to be.” He looked at the bank. “I can’t tell you if there’s one in that bank.”

“Then we’ll need a survey,” said Frau Brunner.

“Yes.”

“In spring. When they’re nesting. Before anything goes in the ground.”

“Yes,” said the All-Seeing. “That’s the only way to know.”

* * *

At twenty past three the All-Seeing looked at his watch and took a memory stick out of his pocket and gave it to the Hand.

“Four o’clock,” he said. “Room twelve. The third slide is the one.”

The Hand looked at the memory stick.

“What’s it about?”

“You’ll see from the slides.”

The Hand put the memory stick in his pocket and went off across the meadow, rolling up his tape measure as he walked. Nobody stopped him.

* * *

Frau Brunner granted the exemption at the bench by the path, writing on the folder on her knee, because there was nowhere else to write.

There were conditions. The building had to survive a flood without making it worse for anybody else. Whatever volume of water it took out of the flood plain had to be given back somewhere else on the meadow, by digging. Compensation volume, it's called. No work on the bank in the breeding season. A kingfisher survey before any pile went in, and a beaver survey, because there are beavers on the Pegnitz, and Frau Brunner would rather ask now than read about it later.

The All-Seeing read the conditions and agreed to every one.

On the way back to the tram, my phone buzzed, from a number I didn't have saved.

From the Companion, it said. *The IFMZ would also like it noted that the bridge closes a gap in the girls' cycling route. Thank you.*

I didn't know there was a girls' cycling route. I forwarded the message to the file.

* * *

The Hand came back to Bauhof 5 at half past five, while I was typing up the site visit. He had the memory stick in his hand and he put it on my counter for the All-Seeing to collect.

"How did it go?" I asked.

"Fine," said the Hand. "They asked about the third slide."

"What did you say?"

He thought about it.

"That it was the third one," he said.

Then he saw Herr Ochs's yellow note on the drawing. He read it, took out a pencil, redrew the choir door so that it opened outwards, initialled it, and put the note in his pocket.

“He’s right,” he said.

Then he read *compensation volume* on my screen over my shoulder, and took out a pencil and the back of an envelope and drew a long shallow hollow across the north side of the meadow, with the depths marked along it. He did the arithmetic down the side. It came out to the volume of the nave below the flood line, exactly.

“For the file,” he said.

The Chaos-Weaver did not come back that afternoon. He was in Ansbach.

Einwendungen

JOINT COMMITTEE OF THE OLD TOWN CHURCHES
c/o the undersigned

To the Bauordnungsbehörde of the City of Nuremberg
Re: Building application, new construction of a cathedral, Wöhrder Wiese

Dear Sir or Madam,

The undersigned write on behalf of the parishes and congregations of the old town, which have not written to anyone jointly on any matter since the sixteenth century, to object to the above application on the following four grounds. . .

Herr Gebhardt called the meeting for half past six, in the conference room on the second floor.

There is no rule that says he had to. A building application has no public hearing. But Herr Gebhardt has always said that if somebody takes the trouble to put a thing on letterhead, he would like to see their face before he decides. I set out the water and the glasses and a notepad at every place, because you do.

* * *

Pastor Ebner came at twenty-five past, with a younger woman from one of the parish offices to take the Committee's minutes.

He was about seventy-five, thin, in a black shirt without the collar, and he sat down opposite Herr Gebhardt and uncapped a fountain pen.

“Thank you for seeing us,” he said.

“Thank you for writing,” said Herr Gebhardt.

The Conscience-Keeper came a minute later and sat on the long side of the table, halfway between them, with the black notebook open.

Pastor Ebner set out the case, clearly and politely. He said that the Committee represented the Lutheran parishes of the old town and the Catholic ones together, and that they had not written a letter together since 1525.

“We agree on this,” he said.

Then he went through the four points, and after each one he stopped, as if he were used to being interrupted.

“That the old town has churches,” said Pastor Ebner. “Many of them. And that many of them are not full on Sunday.”

“That’s true,” said the Conscience-Keeper.

Pastor Ebner had drawn breath for the next sentence. He let it out.

“I beg your pardon?”

“It’s true,” said the Conscience-Keeper. “I counted on Sunday. Before we knew we would apply.” He wrote something in the notebook. “You’re right.”

Pastor Ebner looked at his letter, and went on.

“That a cathedral is the church in which a bishop has his seat. And that there is no bishop to seat.”

“That’s true,” said the Conscience-Keeper.

“You don’t have a bishop.”

“We don’t have a bishop.”

“Then what is the building for?”

The Conscience-Keeper wrote that down too. He didn’t answer it. I think he was waiting for somebody else to.

“That the churches of this city,” said Pastor Ebner, slower now, “are what the Reformation made of them. Here. First. And that a cathedral on the Wöhrder Wiese would be, whatever its builders intended, a statement about that.”

The Conscience-Keeper was quiet for a little longer this time.

“That’s true,” he said. “We hadn’t thought of it. We should have.”

“And that the Wöhrder Wiese belongs, in summer, to the people lying on it.”

“That’s true. We’ll leave them the north side.”

“The north side?”

The Conscience-Keeper took the Hand’s envelope out of the notebook, the drawing of the compensation hollow, and turned it round so Pastor Ebner could see it. A long shallow dip across the north end of the meadow, with the depths marked.

“It’s out of the wind,” said the Conscience-Keeper. “People will lie in it.”

Pastor Ebner looked at the envelope.

“You’re agreeing with me,” said Pastor Ebner.

“Where you’re right.”

“I came here,” said Pastor Ebner, “to argue.”

“I know,” said the Conscience-Keeper. “I’m sorry. You were right four times.”

Nobody said anything. Herr Gebhardt poured himself a glass of water, very carefully, so that it would not make a sound.

* * *

At ten to seven there was a knock on the door, and the Companion came in with three women.

She brought chairs from the wall, and Pastor Ebner stood up, and then didn't know why he had stood up, and sat down. Then she poured a glass for me, and put it at my elbow, with a pretzel on a paper napkin, and went and sat down by the door.

It was the first thing I had eaten since the cheese sandwich. I had not said I was hungry. I ate the pretzel.

The three women were from the IFMZ. The Companion introduced them by their first names and did not speak again for the rest of the meeting.

Selin was in her thirties, a dental assistant, and she had brought a list. Dragica was in her seventies, in a red coat she kept on, and had been going to the Denisstraße since 1981, when she came from Banja Luka and did the German course there. Amani was twenty and studying to be a teacher and had come because, she said, she had never been inside a government building after six o'clock.

"Good evening," said Herr Gebhardt.

"Good evening," said Selin. "Is the heating going to be on?"

Herr Gebhardt looked at me. I looked at the fire safety concept, which I had brought. "There's a heating plan," I said. "Annex fourteen."

“Underfloor?”

“Underfloor.”

Selin ticked something on her list. ”Toilets?”

“By the gate,” I said, before I could stop myself. “And in the building. Annex fifteen.”

Selin ticked.

Dragica had been looking at Pastor Ebner.

“Which church are you?” she said.

“All of them,” said Pastor Ebner. “This week.”

“I’ve been to all of them,” said Dragica. “In the winter. To get warm.” She looked at the Conscience-Keeper. “Underfloor is better. Where do I sit? I can’t stand two hours.”

The Conscience-Keeper said there would be chairs along the walls, loose ones. I said I would ask parking whether loose chairs were seats. Pastor Ebner wrote something with his fountain pen.

Amani had not said anything yet. She said it now.

“Who has the keys?”

“The building owner,” said the Conscience-Keeper.

“So it’s his.”

Nobody answered that. Pastor Ebner put down his pen.

“That was my fourth point,” he said. “The meadow belongs to the people lying on it.”

The Conscience-Keeper looked at his notebook for a long time. Then he turned to the site plan in the file, and put his finger on the path that crosses the Wöhrder Wiese from west to east, where people walk their dogs, and drew the line of it on with his finger, straight through the nave.

“Then the path stays,” he said. “It goes in at the west door and out at the east. Nobody locks it between dawn and dusk.”

“Through the nave,” said Pastor Ebner.

“Through the nave.”

“You’ll have dogs in the nave.”

“Yes,” said the Conscience-Keeper, and wrote it down.

* * *

Herr Gebhardt asked the IFMZ why they supported the application, neutrally, as if the answer would go in a box. Selin’s list had the choir on it, and the foundation stone, and the cycling route, all crossed off. It was Dragica who answered.

“Because it’s big,” she said, “and it’s for nobody. Nobody has it yet. Everywhere I go in this city, it’s already somebody’s. You come in and they look up and they want to know why you came.” She folded her hands on the table. “A room where nobody asks why you’ve come. That’s all.”

Nobody wrote anything down for a moment. Not the young woman from the parish office. Not the Conscience-Keeper. Not me.

Then the door opened and the Chaos-Weaver came in, in his coat, carrying a tea towel.

* * *

It had the Margrave's Residence in Ansbach on it, in blue. He put it in front of Herr Gebhardt, folded, as if it were a document.

"Ansbach," said the Chaos-Weaver.

"How was it?" said Herr Gebhardt.

"Very nice. There's nothing there for the bridge." He sat down beside the Conscience-Keeper. "There's a court."

"The administrative court," I said.

"The administrative court," said the Chaos-Weaver. "It's very nice. They were very helpful at the front desk." He took a leaflet out of his coat and put it on the table, and then, after a moment, slid it along the table to Pastor Ebner. "That's how you sue."

Pastor Ebner looked at the leaflet.

He looked at it for some time. Then he folded it in half and put it in his inside pocket, next to his fountain pen.

"Thank you," he said.

"The opening hours are on the back," said the Chaos-Weaver.

* * *

At ten to eight Herr Gebhardt closed the meeting.

He said that the objections were recorded and must be answered in writing.

"In writing," said Pastor Ebner. "All four?"

"All four," said the Conscience-Keeper. "Tonight."

"Tonight?"

“Two of them are in your favour,” said the Conscience-Keeper. “It won’t take long to write those.”

Pastor Ebner shook hands round the table. Dragica held on to his a little longer than he expected.

“Your church,” she said. “The heating by the door is broken. Since last winter.”

“I know,” said Pastor Ebner. “We’ve applied.”

“To who?”

He nodded at me.

After they had gone I looked it up. It was in my box. It had been in my box for five weeks. It was missing a signature.

Die Kathedra

(note, handwritten, clipped to the front of the file; Friday, 07:40)

1. Catholic. City lies in the Archdiocese of Bamberg (Nuremberg deanery). A new diocese requires Rome. *Not a matter for this office.*
2. Lutheran. Kirchenkreis Nürnberg: regional bishop's term extended to 31 December. The Franconian church districts are restructured from 1 January. *Not a matter for this office.*
3. Fürther Straße 166–168. Seat of a metropolitan since 2001.

— S.

The Hand was at the counter at half past seven on Friday with a roll of tracing paper. The Conscience-Keeper had phoned him at ten the night before, and he had redrawn the west front overnight. He had taken the great doors out and put in a wide plain opening, for the path, with nothing in it that could be closed, and he had moved the font so that the dogs would not walk into it. He unrolled it on my counter and looked at it for a long time.

"It'll be cold," he said.

Then he turned the file round with one finger and found page four.

"Standing congregation," he said.

"Yes."

"And one seat."

"Yes."

"Who sits in it?"

"You drew it," I said.

"I drew it," said the Hand. "I don't know who it's for."

I opened my mouth, and nothing was there. The form asks how many seats. It doesn't ask whose. I had checked that application for three and a half hours, with a ruler, and the form had not asked me, and so I had not asked.

"I don't know," I said. "I logged it, though. The Committee said it. In their letter. Point two. A cathedral is the church where a bishop has his seat, and there's no bishop." I found it in the log. "I logged it as not a building matter."

"Is it?"

I searched the Bavarian building code for the word *Bischof*, and the parking bylaw, and the fire regulations. It isn't in any of them.

"It's not a building matter," I said.

"No," said the Hand.

* * *

The Seeker came in at twenty to eight and clipped a handwritten note to the front of the file, the way you'd clip a receipt to an expense claim.

A cathedral, he said, is the church where a bishop has his chair. The *cathedra*. That's all the word means. The building can be any size. It can be a barn.

Nuremberg had never had one. Not a Catholic one: since 1015 the city has been in the diocese of Bamberg, and to make a new diocese you have to ask Rome, and Rome takes its time. Not a Lutheran one either: the Lutheran bishop of Bavaria is in Munich, and the term of the regional bishop for Nuremberg had been extended only to the end of December, because from the first of January the Franconian church districts were being reorganised, and nobody yet knew who would sit where.

"So there's no bishop," I said.

"There's no Catholic or Lutheran bishop," said the Seeker. "That's not the same thing."

He pointed at the third line of the note.

Fürther Straße 166 to 168. The Romanian Orthodox Metropolis for Germany, Central and Northern Europe. Its metropolitan has had his seat in Nuremberg since 2001, in an ordinary parish church bought from the Lutherans and converted. The first bishop ever to live in Nuremberg, the Seeker said. On the Fürther Straße.

"There's a cathedral," said the Seeker. "There's been one for twenty-five years." He looked at the note. "On Tuesday I said there had never been one. I was looking under Catholic and Lutheran. I should have written *Gap*."

* * *

I was born in Nuremberg. I have taken the U1 under the Fürther Straße perhaps a thousand times, to my mother's in Fürth, and I did not know. I said so.

“Most people don’t,” said the Seeker, the way he had said *Gap* on Wednesday.

The Hand was already putting on his coat.

“I’ll go and look at it,” he said.

I looked down the corridor. Herr Gebhardt was at his desk with the Conscience-Keeper’s written answers to the Committee, which had arrived at seven. He had heard everything. My desk is twelve metres from his door.

“Go,” he said.

* * *

The Hand walked, about three kilometres, out past the Plärrer and west. The U-Bahn did not occur to him.

He stopped at every building site. At one he went up to the fence and pointed at a ledger on the scaffold, and the man in the hard hat got out a spirit level and went up, and came down, and said something to his foreman. The Hand was already walking on.

“What was it?” I said.

“A centimetre.”

My phone rang. It was Herr Pöhlmann, about Dragica’s chairs. He had been thinking about it all night. Loose chairs, he had decided, are furniture, and furniture is not seats. One fixed seat. One car space.

“Thank you,” I said. “I’m on the Fürther Straße.”

“Why?”

“There’s a cathedral here.”

There was a pause.

"How many seats?" said Herr Pöhlmann.

* * *

We got there at half past eight. You would not know it was a cathedral. I would not have known. It looks like a parish church, because it was one, like a hundred other Lutheran churches built for a hundred other parishes, in a city that has always had more churches than it needed. There is a sign that says what it is now.

The Hand stopped on the pavement opposite. We stood there for a long time. Traffic went past between us and the church.

He looked at the roof, and then down, at the gutters and the downpipes and the joints where the old church had been made into the new one.

"The left downpipe's new," he said. "The right one isn't. The pointing round the west door was done by someone who knew. Somebody's put a ramp in." He looked at the ramp. "Good ramp."

"Is it a good building?"

"It's a parish church," said the Hand. "Somebody built it for one congregation. Then somebody else came along with a bishop and made it a cathedral." He watched the roof for a while longer. "They did it backwards from us. They had the hard part first."

"What's the hard part?"

"The chair," said the Hand.

* * *

A young man came out of a side door carrying a crate of candles. He saw us on the opposite pavement and called across.

"You can come in," he said. "If you want to look."

The Hand crossed the road. I went after him.

His name was Andrei. He held the door, and he did not ask what we wanted. He showed us in and stood back.

I didn't look at everything. It wasn't mine to look at. It was a church, with the light coming in, and icons, a great many, on the walls and on the screen across the front, and among them, Andrei showed us, one with Nuremberg in it, the castle and the spires, painted in the old way, in gold.

Along the walls there were chairs. A few. For the old, Andrei said, and the tired. Everybody else stands, for the length of the liturgy.

The Hand looked at the floor, and then at the doors. He was doing what Herr Ochs had done with his finger: floor area, people standing, width of exits.

"It works," he said, quietly, to me.

It did. I did the arithmetic in my head, the way Herr Ochs had. It matched.

At the front there was a chair, behind the screen, that we could not see properly from where we stood. Andrei did not offer to show it to us, and we did not ask.

We thanked him. He said we were welcome, and went back to his candles.

* * *

At the Plärrer, on the way back, waiting for the lights, the Hand said:

"We'll build the room."

"Yes."

"Somebody else has to bring the chair."

The lights changed. We crossed.

At the scaffold the man in the hard hat saw us coming and raised his spirit level in the air like a trophy. The Hand raised a hand back.

When I got to my desk there was an email from Herr Pöhlmann. He could find no requirement for the bicycle stand to be covered, but he would recommend it, on the grounds that it would be a shame to leave the bicycle out in the rain.

I wrote back that I agreed, and that the bicycle had a bell.

Bescheid

STADT NÜRNBERG — BAUORDNUNGSBEHÖRDE
Building permit

Building owner: the Allfather
Project: New construction of a cathedral, with pedestrian bridge over the Pegnitz, Wöhrder Wiese

The permit is issued subject to the following conditions, and without prejudice to the private rights of third parties.

1. Archaeological supervision of all ground works (each pile).
2. Clearance of explosive ordnance before any ground works.
3. Kingfisher and beaver surveys before any works on the bank; no works on the bank in the breeding season.
4. Flood-compatible construction; compensation volume as shown (envelope, Annex 31).
5. Public path through the building (west door to east door), open dawn to dusk.
6. Car spaces: 1. Bicycle spaces: 1 (covered).

Instructions on legal remedies: an action against this permit may be brought within one month of its notification at the Administrative Court in Ansbach.

Issued: Friday, 17:01

Herr Gebhardt read the Conscience-Keeper's answers to the Committee on Friday morning, all four.

The answer to the third point said that the applicant agreed that a cathedral on the Wöhrder Wiese would be a statement

about the Reformation, and did not wish to make it, and that the west towers had therefore been drawn one metre and forty centimetres lower than the towers of St. Lorenz, so that from the castle the old church would still be the taller.

"I knew what they'd say," Herr Gebhardt said, when he gave them back to me. "I read them anyway."

* * *

Before lunch Herr Wolf phoned from planning.

"They voted," he said. "The planning committee. Yesterday, and again this morning, in an extra session. To begin a development plan for the Wöhrder Wiese." He paused. "And then somebody moved to complete it. And it was seconded."

"Overnight?"

"Overnight."

"That's not how plans work," I said.

"I said that. They minuted it." I could hear him turn a page. "There's supposed to be a month on public display. People are supposed to come in and look at the plan and write to us. About the bicycle rack. About anything." He was quiet for a moment. "Nobody got to. I minuted that too."

I put a sheet in the file: *Public display: not held.* I didn't know what else to do with it.

* * *

At a quarter past twelve I went to the Messe.

I went on my lunch break, because the Allfather's panel was at one o'clock, the last session of the conference.

The desk at the entrance wanted a lanyard. I had my city pass on its cord, which the woman at the desk looked at, kindly, and shook her head at.

The Companion came through the doors behind me with a paper bag from a bakery. She took the blue lanyard from round her own neck and put it over my head.

"I won't need it," she said. "I'm only dropping these off."

She gave the paper bag to the woman at the desk, who looked into it and said, "Oh," and the Companion went out again the way she had come in.

* * *

There were five people at a long table on a stage, with name cards. The Allfather was at the end. His name card said what everybody had been calling him all week.

I sat at the back and listened for forty minutes, and I could not tell you what the panel was about. Its title had a colon in it, and both halves were words I knew, and together they didn't mean anything I could repeat.

The Allfather spoke twice.

The first time, he leaned forward to the microphone and said:

"Most of it is already built. People forget that."

Then he leaned back.

The second time was near the end, after a long question about responsibility, I think, which the other four answered at length.

"Somebody has to sign," said the Allfather.

The audience laughed. It was the biggest laugh of the session. The woman next to me wrote it down. I still don't know what was funny about it, and I watch people sign things for a living.

His phone rang during the applause at the end.

It rang the way it had rung at the Altstadthof, an old bell, and people in the front rows turned round. He went out by the side door onto the terrace, and through the glass I could see him with his back to the hall and the phone to his ear, not saying very much.

I did not ask who it was.

He came back in after four minutes, and passed my row, and stopped.

"It's covered," he said.

"What is?"

"The conditions," said the Allfather. "All of them." And he went to get his glass.

* * *

At sixteen fifty-eight Herr Gebhardt signed the permit, with the fountain pen he keeps for council permits and retirement cards, and I took the folder down to the counter, where four of them were waiting: the Allfather, the Conscience-Keeper, the Chaos-Weaver, and the Companion.

The Allfather read the permit from the top, every line. At condition six he stopped, and turned the page round, and put his finger on it.

"The bicycle," he said.

I looked. *Bicycle spaces: 1.* I had agreed with Herr Pöhlmann that it should be covered, and I had not typed it.

I took the permit back up the corridor. Herr Gebhardt was putting his coat on. He took it off again. I retyped the page, and he signed it again, with the same pen, at one minute past five. The counters had closed. The hall downstairs was empty, and you could hear the cleaner's trolley two floors down.

With the permit went the fee notice, calculated on the construction sum. I had typed the figure into the box that afternoon and not looked at it again.

The Allfather read the new page, and nodded, and read on to the instructions on legal remedies.

"Ansbach," said the Chaos-Weaver, over his shoulder, pleased.

The Companion had a message.

"From the IFMZ," she said. "They'd like to know if they could have the keys on Tuesdays."

The Conscience-Keeper opened the notebook to the last page with writing on it and wrote that down, under everything else. Then he looked at the page for a moment, and then he closed the notebook, and put the elastic round it.

"Is that all?" I said.

"That's all," said the Conscience-Keeper.

There was one more letter in the folder. It had come from the city's property office at twenty to five. The city, it said, was not

in a position to grant a lease of the Wöhrder Wiese at this time, and the request would be put to the appropriate committee in due course.

The Allfather read it. The permit is issued without prejudice to the private rights of third parties, and the third party was the city, and the city had not said yes.

"Then we wait," said the Allfather.

He put the permit under his arm.

"Thank you, Frau Dorn," he said.

"It's my job," I said.

"I know," said the Allfather. He looked at the counter, at the box of forms and the receiving stamp and the ink pad that makes the stamp come out darker at the top. "That's why."

They went out. I watched them through the window, not in any hurry. At the corner the Chaos-Weaver went one way and the rest went the other, and then after a few steps he turned round and followed them, as if he had only wanted to see what would happen.

* * *

They left on Saturday. I didn't see them off. I didn't know which train, and I didn't ask.

On Monday morning, before I filed anything, I took the heating application out of my box. The missing signature was the second one from the parish council. I phoned the parish office and told them whose it was and where it went. They said the man was eighty-three and didn't come in on Mondays. I took the form round to his flat at lunchtime, on the tram. He

signed it at his kitchen table. It was still required. I didn't waive it. I carried it.

That afternoon there was a bundle in my in-tray. Three lanyards from three seminars, with a rubber band round them, and on the top one, in pencil, on the back of the card, *For the file*. I knew whose they were. I put them in the drawer with the beer mat.

Then I filed the case.

I file the way I check: from the top, with a ruler. The application, complete. The fire safety concept for a standing congregation. The compensation volume on the back of an envelope. Herr Pöhlmann's note: *1/1, rounded up, agreed with applicant*. Herr Wolf's: *Not how plans work*. Four objections and four answers, two of them in the Committee's favour. *Public display: not held.* A letter from the property office. A letter from the IFMZ. A message about a cycling route. A note about Tuesdays.

I went through the application form one more time, field by field, because that is how you close a file.

Building owner: signed.

Design author: the Hand, registration verified.

Fixed seats: one. In pencil, a circle.

Parking: one car space and one bicycle space, rounded up. Covered.

Bishop: there is no field for it.