

Chapter 18_Werner Noth's Beautiful Blue Vase ...

In the chapter from "Mother Night," the narrative begins with Howard and Helga, who are finally alone together, feeling an awkward sense of shyness. Despite being somewhat advanced in age and having spent many years in celibacy, Howard struggles with his vulnerability as a lover, particularly given Helga's youthful demeanor. Their conversation, conducted in German, unfolds as they attempt to reconnect. Helga humorously challenges Howard to define his political affiliations based on patriotic symbols he doodled on the window, prompting him to avoid politics entirely and instead focus on music, specifically his fondness for Bing Crosby's "White Christmas," revealing the layer of humor in his situation.

As they share smiles and small moments, Helga expresses concern about their family, particularly about her parents and her sister, Resi Noth. Howard shares a poignant memory from February 12, 1945, the day he last saw them. He recalls visiting the Noths in their resilient, well-maintained white house on the outskirts of a war-torn Berlin. Dressed in a uniform of the Free American Corps, which he helped create yet was not truly successful, Howard recounts his intention to bid farewell to the family. His love for them shines through as he describes Werner Noth, Helga's father, and the chaotic scene outside: Polish and Russian women lugging furniture away, while Werner himself panics over a beautiful blue vase almost dropped by a weary slave.

Werner's intense reaction underscores the chaos and violence surrounding them; he saves the vase and implores others to appreciate it, demonstrating a haunting juxtaposition of beauty and desolation. In this context, Howard expresses his intent to head for the front as they say goodbye, revealing mutual understanding and concern. The conversation shifts as they touch on the painful realities of the war: Werner directs Howard to deal with Resi's dog which cannot accompany them, further personalizing their tragedy. He compliments Howard's uniform, hinting at a complex relationship shaded by history and regret.

Finally, Werner communicates his ambivalence toward Howard, showing that despite decades of enmity linked to nationality and war, he appreciates the way Howard helped anchor him amid the madness of the times. With layered emotional exchanges about duty, loyalty, and the absurdity of war, the chapter crafts a portrait of connection and misunderstanding amidst looming destruction.