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**ON THE CALCULATION
OF VOLUME**

BOOK III

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I have met someone who remembers. Yesterday. That is to say, I met him yesterday. But he remembers yesterday, too. He remembers that we met yesterday. Actually, we met the day before, but we didn't speak until yesterday. Yesterday he acquired a name. His name is Henry Dale, and I don't need to tell him that time has ground to a halt. He already knows.

And he knows a lot more than that. He knows it is autumn, but that we're not heading into winter. That spring and summer will not follow. That the reds and yellows of the trees are here to stay. He knows what the words mean: that *yesterday* doesn't mean the seventeenth of November, that *tomorrow* means the eighteenth again, and that the nineteenth is a day we may never see. He knows it when he wakes up in the morning and when he goes to bed at night.

Now he also knows that he is not alone, because this morning we met at Café Möller. We met because we had arranged to meet, and because we both remembered this was what we had arranged. Two people who remembered. Not one who remembered and one who forgot. It's strange to think: someone walked through the door with their memory intact.

Because that is what he did: he walked through the door of the café. When he arrived shortly before nine o'clock, I was already sitting at the table. I had got there around half past eight, ordered a coffee at the counter and waited for the table by the window to become free. At 8.39 it did, so I hadn't been sitting there for very long when Henry D. came up the steps.

He opened the door, spotted me at the table, and with a look that made it clear he'd recognised me, he walked over, hesitating for the moment it took me to get to my feet, and then we just stood there, face to face, unable to come up with a suitable greeting.

Henry D. took a step towards me, extending his hand, but just as I moved forward, he drew it back a bit. I turned slightly, and we found ourselves in a lopsided embrace – me attempting an air-kiss to the one side, him giving my shoulder a few pats – and this strange medley of hellos, scraps of old habits we had dragged with us from the past, turned the whole thing into an odd little dance: clumsy and a bit off-kilter.

We couldn't help but laugh, probably at our wavering and the oddness of our gestures, but also because we felt out of practice. We had apparently both lost the knack of greeting another person, or rather, of greeting a person we recognised and who recognised us in return.

Not that it's anything extraordinary. We were just two people who had met the day before and had moved the other from the category of *a person* to that of *a specific person*, and now we were meeting again. It should have been simple, but we were clearly so used to being among people who didn't believe they'd seen us before that we no longer remembered how to greet a person we knew.

But we did: we knew each other. Because we met yesterday and we remembered it today, and even though I've seen all the café's patrons and staff and everybody on the street outside many more times than I've seen Henry D., none of them would have said that they knew me. In fact, they would have said they had never set eyes on me before. The recognising happens only on my part, naturally enough, but then here we were, Henry D. and I, and if anyone had asked whether we knew each other, we could have said that yes, as a matter of fact we did. We had spoken, we knew each other's names, we remembered having met, and now we were resuming a conversation which had started yesterday at the university and could be picked up again as we sat at the window table in Café Möller, where we had both shown up and greeted each other with an awkward dance that made us laugh.

He must have felt as astonished as I did, because all at once a lightness came over us, a giddiness which couldn't be attributed solely to our lack of sleep the night before. We laughed our quick, relieved laughs, and suddenly there was nothing

remarkable about the situation. We were simply picking up a conversation which had already begun.

The thought of our meeting makes me smile now, and it occurs to me how long I've lived without this mutual recognition, the little mental jolt, a faint quiver in the brain as you recognise someone who recognises you back. A sensation that had been absent for so long it came as a surprise: a peculiar new feeling which launched us into an odd little dance.

I am back in the flat on Wiesenweg, alone now that we've parted ways, but still astonished that it's possible for two people to share a common history in the midst of the eighteenth of November, a very brief history, but a history all the same, of meetings and goodbyes and reunions and plans to meet again.

Once our relieved and slightly nervous laughter had died away, Henry D. admitted he'd been worried. He'd been afraid that my memory of our encounter would be erased overnight. I told him that in the early morning hours, after a sleepless night, I had nearly convinced myself that I'd imagined the whole thing; that our meeting hadn't taken place, that it hadn't happened at all. But it had, it had happened, and he ordered a cup of coffee and we had breakfast, and although I still don't quite understand how it could be possible, suddenly there we were, talking about when we first met, yesterday, at the university, he with his version of events, I with mine:

him making his way down the steps in a lecture theatre; me edging my way along a row of seats, him eyeing the woman coming towards him with surprise, me gesturing that I'd like a word. And there we stood, each with our own view, from two different angles, but the ingredients were the same, the room and the rows of seats and the steps leading to the exit. We remembered all of it, and we could share that recollection because there were two of us who had stored our meeting in our memories.

After breakfast, we returned to my flat, and I showed him in – not to my Roman mess, not to bags of rubbish by the door, half-empty cups, salad tubs, floors strewn with loose sheets of paper and books, but to my tidy kitchen, to my living room with its bookshelves and folders and neatly stacked papers. All the material for my investigations was there. Books on the Greeks and Macedonians, the Mycenaeans and Persians, a few pages of notes on the Hittites and Sumerians, and a pile on the Egyptians. And then, of course, there were the Romans. There were books on the Franks and files on the Spartans and Etruscans. There were notes on northern tribes, lists of various Germanic peoples, and on the table next to the computer lay both Janita Weng's *Rome and Rye* and her latest book, *Noxious Pustule: The Case Against Claviceps Purpurea*, along with a survey on marine archaeological artefacts, everything in an order that was not chronological nor alphabetical nor geographical nor arranged according to any other well-known system, but an order of sorts nonetheless. It was

possible to walk around without stepping on piles of papers and books, there was none of the scattered detritus from days and nights spent on the trail of dead Romans and lost civilisations. It was easy to move around the flat, you didn't have to dig your way through or clear a forest or hack a path with a machete. It was simply a flat, the relatively tidy flat of an inquisitive person, which we left again after a quick tour, a look at the medlar tree in the backyard, a glass of water by the kitchen sink, and then off we went, leaving our bags on the kitchen floor. It wasn't something we discussed. We just left them there and set off for a walk by the river.

By then we had long since begun to unravel the story, the string of eighteenth of November which we called up from our memories, all the way back to the very first day and further still, to our lives before the eighteenth, and then back again to more November days. We sat on the stone wall by the river watching as boats sailed by, jumping back and forth in our strings of days before arriving once again, or more than once, at the details of our unexpected meeting, at the uneasiness, the surprise and the inexplicable coincidence that had brought us together. And after sitting by the river for long enough, we strolled towards town, eventually returning to my flat where Henry picked up his bag and we parted ways – he to his hotel, I to my bed, where I would have gone to sleep if I could, but I no longer feel tired; instead I'm oddly perky, struck with wonder, because even though I have sometimes considered whether it would be possible to drag someone else

with me into the eighteenth of November, I could never have imagined that I might meet someone already walking around in my loop.

It was the Romans who led me to Henry D. Or rather, I wasn't led to Henry D. He simply appeared. I might have met him before, because I'm now quite certain that I saw him in the canteen at Heinrich Heine Universität on one of my first visits. Maybe, if I had been paying attention, if I had been looking for anomalies, I would have met him sooner. But I wasn't looking for anomalies; I was looking for the Romans. And when I wasn't looking for the Romans, I was looking for Greeks and Etruscans, Sumerians and Mycenaean, Germans and Franks. That sort of thing. I wasn't looking for a man with a bag.

Henry D. wasn't looking for anyone either. He had simply walked into a lecture theatre and taken a seat. The day before yesterday. Although, as he said, one is always on the lookout to some extent, I suppose. He had been visiting the university and had seen a notice for a lecture by the entrance to the lecture theatre. Then, he had walked in and taken a seat in one of the back rows.

When I walked up the steps and sat down in the same row as Henry D., I had already attended this lecture once before. The first time had been on one of my very earliest visits to the university. I had wandered somewhat aimlessly up and down

the corridors and eventually found my way to the canteen. There, I had come across a notice, a reminder about a lecture on the eighteenth of November: *Heute*, it said in big, red letters followed by something about trade and supply chain reliability in the Roman Empire. The lecture was apparently part of a longer series being held throughout the autumn, an interdisciplinary collaboration of some kind, on complex societies from antiquity to the present day.

The lecture would be starting soon, and after loitering for a short while in the canteen I made my way a little hesitantly to the lecture theatre, which I found without much trouble. I remember feeling quite unprepared, and almost turned back, but instead, with a nod to the handful of lecturegoers already seated, I slipped into the third row. Just before the lecture began, a large group of students arrived. The front rows were suddenly filled with people, all of whom knew each other and were chatting back and forth, and I felt very much in the way, as though I were intruding.

The lecture dealt mainly with the logistical apparatus required to ensure the steady flow of goods and resources which kept Roman society functioning. In particular, it focused on the challenges of importing, transporting and storing the vast quantities of grain needed. The lecture was in German and as it went on I became more and more aware that my command of the language was not quite as good as I had hoped. While my German was perfectly adequate for everyday use, many

of the nuances and technical terms were lost on me. Still, my interest was piqued and when I left the lecture theatre, it was with the certainty that I would come back.

And eventually I did go back, the day before yesterday, arriving only moments before the lecture began. This time I was on surer ground. In the meantime, I had not only become better acquainted with the Romans, I had also begun to feel more at home among the students, and on several occasions I had sneaked into classes in the various departments. Both my knowledge of German and my world had expanded, and I began to move around with a cautious eagerness that opened one door after another, to rooms and lecture theatres where I often sat at the back, to classes which, for one reason or another, had caught my interest and, of course, to the world of the Romans – to doors leading in or out.

I felt well-prepared. I had found video recordings of the first lectures in the series and familiarised myself with some of the technical terms being bandied about. At the library I had picked up books about the Roman Empire's resources and the scarcity thereof: about water consumption, mining and food imports. I had read articles on both the grain trade and the management of the enormous granaries, and I had finally finished Janita Weng's *Rome and Rye*, in which she argued that it was the shortage of wheat in the north which had halted the Roman expansion. I had sat in my armchair night after night, reading her long and detailed descriptions. I read about the

critical importance of grain rations and supplies, about the unrest that broke out as soon as distribution began to fail, about wheat bread as a marker of identity, as Weng put it. She posited that the Roman sense of self was inextricably bound up with the grain supply, wheat having been viewed from early on as the very thing that distinguished humans from animals, Romans from barbarians. The story of wheat had become the story of a people's superiority, she contended. In Plautus's comedies the primitive tribes were mocked for offering weeds to their guests, as if they were oxen. Weng cited Pliny and Galen. She described the Roman aversion to the black bread eaten in the cooler regions of Thrace and Macedonia, which was not considered fit for human consumption. She expounded on the evils of rye, and apparently this was the one thing Romans could agree on – and had for five hundred years: without wheat, they would fall into a primitive state, into the depths of barbarism. Only wheat eaters were civilised. An emperor or *praefectus annonae* unable to provide his people with wheat could scarcely be deemed Roman, and it went without saying that grains such as rye were fit only for barbarians and beasts.

As it turned out, I had gradually become more interested in the barbarians than in the Romans. In all those who had provided the building blocks for the Roman world, in vanished peoples the Romans barely knew about, and in all those who came after, who would soon encroach on the Roman territories, countless tribes and groups and peoples with names I'd

never heard of. My forays into the world of the Romans had taken me in several directions at once, into a web of countries and kingdoms and cultures. I was no longer preoccupied with my own arrested state or the boundaries of the Roman Empire – or at least not as much as before. What intrigued me now were all the different empires that had existed, constantly interacting with one another, sometimes through war and conflict, other times through gradual cross-pollination.

Maybe that is why I returned once more to the university the day before yesterday. Because I wanted to know more. About this fine-woven network which stretched out in every direction. The contrast, perhaps, between all the Romans' containers and this constant exchange with their surroundings. In any case, I once again took the tram to the university, running a little late, and dashed across the square, past the people sitting about on the low walls, took a shortcut along one of the buildings and slipped in through a side door close to the lecture theatre where the lecture was to be held. The flock of young students had already fluttered into their places and sat there, restless and chattering in the front rows as I hurried up the steps and took a seat towards the back where there was a bit more air. Further along my row sat three or four others. Henry Dale – or the person who turned out to be Henry Dale – was among them.

I didn't see him at first. I was sitting a few seats in from the end of the row and only noticed him because he left the lecture