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HAYDN UNBOUND, 1790

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Prince Nikolaus is dead, and I can leave
the desert of his Esterháza palace,
a beautiful backwater I have grown
so tired of. *The Farewell Symphony*
should have been my last. New venues beckon,
where finally I'll serve myself, my muse,
and no one else—although I'll always pine
for Frau von Genzinger, that lovely, perfect
woman who said my scores were "stimulating"
and whose snot-nosed offspring I taught their scales
just to breathe in the air through which she moved.
Leaving her plush, perfumed salon, my spirits
sank, and my feet dragged like a heavy load,
shuffling me home.

Despite the revolution
and armies in the roads of France, I need
to leave for London, need to leave my wife
behind. Our wedding at St. Stephen's was
a compromise: she knew I loved her sister,
who scorned me for a nunnery. Her father
then fobbed the older one on me. And Mozart:
"A bachelor's only half alive." But marriage
to one who cannot love will leave a husband
halfway to his grave. Her bed has never
warmed, and her passions flare in fights about
my gifts to friends and family, or in jealousy
when I compose new solos for young Babett
and have to practice deep into the night.
Maria is a beast who doesn't care
if I'm a cobbler or a Bach; she lines
her pans with manuscripts I've written for
the prince. Of course she thinks Luiga's son
is mine because I put her in my operas.
Maybe he is; he's in my will. Her point.

Enough of the wigmaker's daughter. Still,
at fifty-eight, I thrill to every shape
of charm and beauty. London welcomed Handel,
and now its lights are drawing me away
from all I've known. Although I'll be alone
and fear I'll miss Vienna and the court,
my music's understood around the world,
if not when I'm at home in Eisenstadt.