“Vacation” was not something that Doctor Helen Schwartz got to particularly *enjoy* most of the time. Sure, being head of Research & Development at the East Coast Yeng branch meant the occasional business trip that could be written off on the books, but *going* and *being told* to go were two entirely different things.

The office could take care of itself, and the good doctor was beginning to feel the strain and monotony of going so long without doing something just for Helen. Between Yeng’s brand of shady business dealings and her own interest in let’s say “less-than-happy” science, the good doctor had long felt that she had earned this.

And while Helen chipperly drummed her hands on her thighs and bounced to the music that played inside of her head, eagerly telling herself that she had earned this departure from the norm, the poor woman upon whom Helen had descended in the name of having fun during her time away from the office had been wondering just what exactly she had done to *deserve* such a fate.

“Must you beat incessantly on those hamhock thighs of yours, Helen?” the younger woman grumbled from behind the grand oaken desk, “Your atonal ham boning is making it *very* difficult to—”

“It is not atonal!” Helen huffed with playful indignation, crossing her arms over her full chest, “It is very clearly Mozart’s Symphony for Two Pianos.”

“Your thighs are hardly as much pianos as they are drums.” Franziska von Karma clenched her teeth together as she stared ahead to the large portrait of her father that hung over the door, as if for guidance, “I would thank you to show me courtesy as I endeavor to—”

“That is a *very* long way of saying ‘you’re bothering me, please stop.’”

“If I asked you to stop, would you stop?”

“Probably not.”

“And so, you see my point.”

Franziska von Karma and her cousin, Helen Schwartz, were the Younger and Older cousin respectively—though you would have been hard-pressed to find anyone who thought that the shorter, rounder woman between the two of them was a good ten years older than her more litigious counterpart. Franziska had been enduring her cousin’s antics for years now, and they had probably aged her considerably since childhood.

Franziska would not die decrepit and gray, she’d die wiry and graying, and it was all thanks to her cousin’s occasional “vacations” to the Von Karma mansion.

“Ach! I just want to have fun with mein cousin on mein only week off!” Helen whined, letting her head roll back as she pouted to an unaffected office, “What happened to the Franzy that used to want to explore the city with her cousin?!”

“She literally never existed.” Franziska furrowed her slate blue brow, “And don’t call me Franzy.”

“*The cousin that I used to know and play with when we were little girls would—”*

“ARGHHHHHHHH!!”

The smaller woman put her head in her hands and let out a primal howl. A rare loss of composure for the prosecutor prodigy. But despite its intention, Franziska’s warning cry had done little to ward off the pesky pudgy doctor that poked and prodded at her nerves so easily.

“You are the biggest fool this side of the Von Karma family tree! No! The orchard that it grows in!” Franziska pointed a gloved hand at her cousin, “How is it that every time we see one another you managed to find some new way to annoy me?!”

“Because nobody knows how to get under your skin quite like family!” Helen said with a cat-like smile of satisfaction, “See? There’s the cousin that I know and love! Not this stuffy pencil-pushing prosecutor.”

“I have *always* been a pencil-pushing prosecutor… and I’m not stuffy!”

“Stu-ffy Fran-zy~”

“How is it that you and I look so much alike, but have absolutely nothing in common?!”

“I think that we have plenty in common! You come and annoy me when I’m at work.”

“I have literally never set foot in the same state as you.”

“And that annoys me very much—” Helen said with a playfully exaggeration of her lower lip, “Daven’s Port has a wonderful culture, Franzy! You should come and broaden your horizons! Und your favorite cousin lives there!”

“I shall take it under consideration…” the younger woman groused, stewing in her own distaste before delivering a deep mournful sigh, “Helen, if I agree to go on one of your inane little walks around the garden, would you agree to letting me get this casework finished *at some point tonight*?”

“Ja. I would absolutely love that.” Helen poked her index fingers into her chubby cheeks with a chipper smile, “See? It was not so difficult to simply appease your cousin for a little family bonding time, was it?”

“I have a feeling that it will be more difficult with every passing day that you’re here…” Franziska said with another long, mournful sigh, “Which is to say… a few days?”

“More like a few weeks.” Helen rose to her feet, dusting herself off as though she had been gathering dust for ages now, “But I am sure that after the first week, it will all flyyyyy by, ja?”

“Ja.” Franziska glowered as she begrudgingly rose to her feet, allowing Helen to hook her chubby arm underneath her thin and wiry one, “Time will just fly by…”

“Ach! It has been so long since I have been back to the Fatherland. Tell me, is that little Mexican Food place still near Uncle Manfred’s estate?”

“I will never understand how someone raised in Mexico wound up having such a thick German accent…” the younger cousin groused, “Then, that wouldn’t be the most questionable thing about you, would it Helen?”

“Not by a long shot!” Helen’s chubby cheeks bounced with laughter as she toddled along her spry cousin, “Come come, Franzy—we have so much catching up to do!”

And so, the beginning to a long (very long, depending on who you’re asking) vacation in Germany began.