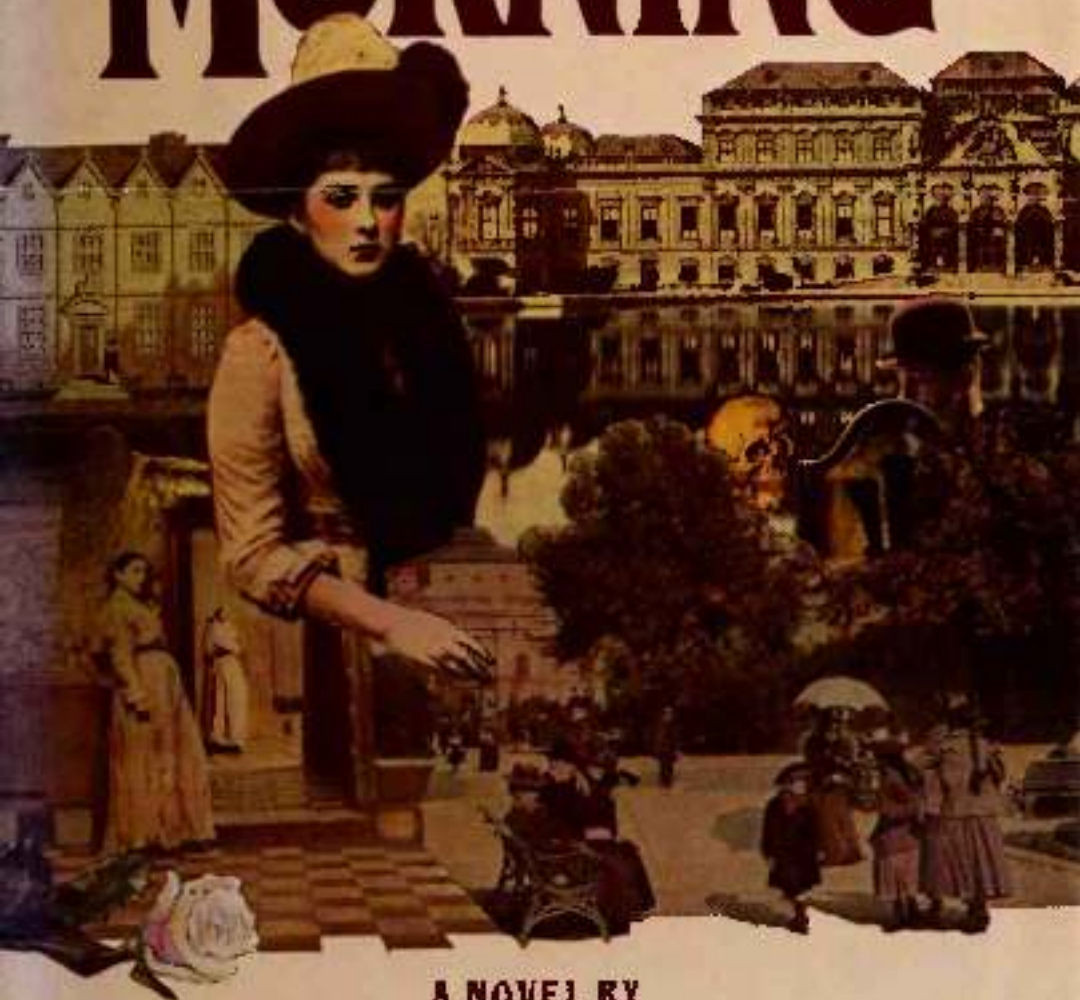


ELLEANDER MORNING



A NOVEL BY
JERRY YULSMAN

ELLEANDER MORNING

JERRY YULSMAN

"... God, if he exists, is making a bad joke, sending a whore out to unseat a lynchpin.

Once again Lesley felt a chill ascend her spine. In a small voice, she said, "The joke was on God."

1907: pantyhose, an original Jackson Pollock, and a Sony seventeen inch television set. 1983: the *Ever Normandy* still at sea, a Time-Life photo history of a war that never occurred. All just a part of a seemingly unsolvable enigma that bedevils all who attempt to deal with it, including a matched pair of ancient prostitutes, a celebrated female historian, and a power-mad Prussian field marshal.

Elleander Morning is a strange and beautiful Edwardian Englishwoman who sets out to alter the course of history and thus creates a bizarre legacy that spans generations to fall into the hands of her American granddaughter. It is a

(continued on back flap)

Book Club

**ELLEANDER
MORNING**

A Novel
by Jerry Yulsman



ST. MARTIN'S PRESS
NEW YORK

ELLEANDER MORNING

A Novel

by Jerry Yulsman



ST. MARTIN'S/MAREK
NEW YORK

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MORNING

A Novel

by Jerry Yulsman

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ST. MARTIN'S/MAREK
NEW YORK

To Lesley Dornen
and
Linda Raskin
and
Barbara Woike

History is bunk!

—Henry Ford

ELLEANDER MORNING

Volume 1912

The young man with a face that was a mixture of
sun and shadow, with a smile that was a mixture
of joy and sorrow, was the one who had
been waiting for her. He had been waiting
for her since the day she had left him. He
had been waiting for her since the day she
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Vienna: 1913

The young man woke up angry. The window was closed. It had been open when he went to bed last night, so once again the old Jew was trying to suffocate him. He lay glaring at the clapboard partition that separated his tiny cubicle from Goldman's and divided their mutual window into two equal parts. It was an arrangement once characterized by Kanya, the hostel's proprietor, a purlor-Marxist, as "democratic compromise." Kanya's hackneyed utterances infuriated him.

He kicked out viciously, striking the thin, unpainted partition just under a narrow shelf holding some of his art supplies. A tumbler containing watercolor brushes crashed to the floor. His rage ripened. He kicked again as he heard his neighbor come awake with a hacking, liquid cough. Slim! He sat up, pounding the wall with both fists. He cried out in a shrill falsetto, "Goldman! I will not inhale your Jew filth!"

Someone down the corridor shouted for silence. He continued pounding, and was rewarded with a drawn-out groan from the other side of the wall, then a shuffling sound and a series of Yiddish curses as the window slowly opened.

The young man unbuttoned his long gray underwear to expose the thin flesh of his chest and belly to the rush of cold March air. From the window, he watched as a taxi slowed to a stop across the street. He could not remember ever having seen one parked on the Meldemannstrasse before. Taxis were a rare sight in the district; no one could afford them.

He counted the scattered pfennigs on his small table. There were seven of them, all that remained of nine crowns he had received the previous week for a poster advertising Teddy's Perspiration Powder. He would have to sell something. Searching through the litter, he found two small pen-and-ink sketches of St. Stephen's Cathedral. He smoothed out the creases, then slid them into a battered portfolio.

As an artist he was incapable of drawing from life. The little sketches and paintings he did of Viennese landmarks were copied from picture postcards or existing renderings of one type or another he found in galleries and museums. His work was stilted and lifeless, much like the carelessly drawn, rough sketches of neophyte architects. The human figures he sometimes added resembled cartoon characters, tiny stuffed sacks, and grotesque dwarfs superimposed in front of monuments, churches, and palaces.

He stood in his sagging underwear gazing out the window at the Vienna rooftops. Beyond the canted roofs of the Twentieth District, the monumental buildings of the Ringstrasse punctuated the horizon, symbols of an imperial city attempting to rule a now crumbling, ramshackle empire of fifty million souls.

In the near distance, the overcast rendered everything in colorless shades of gray like an underdeveloped photograph. The view augmented his depression. He swallowed deeply, fighting back nausea.

After almost four years he was sick of Vienna. They had been miserable years, beginning with his rejection from the academy, then ending here, in a hovel shared by Jews, Czechs, and other rubble. But there had been, he recalled, even worse times than these. During the summer in which his orphan's pension had been terminated, he had slept miserably in doorways or under the trees of Schönbrunn Park. The following winter he had spent his nights on lice-infested straw mattresses in a dosshouse behind the Meidling Station. He would never forget the constant chilblains and chronic nasal catarrh he had suffered after being forced to sell his overcoat for food in this, the most prosperous city in Europe.

Vienna, though busking in the twilight of the Empire, remained unique. It was the envy of Europe, a charming baroque city even more exciting, it was said, than Paris. Its people, under the now benign Hapsburgs, reveled in its art, its souping rousic, its majestic

rococo architecture. A burgeoning middle class gorged itself on cinnamon-flavored coffee and heavy-cream cakes in a hundred convivial cafés. During the long evenings they took delight in the opera, the theater, the ballet. They danced, flirted and made love, leaving politics to the working classes whose social-democratic trade unionism was eroding the Hapsburg power. Vienna was not only the most romantic city in Europe, but also the most democratic.

The young artist hated it all.

For him, the Empire had become the embodiment of racial degeneration. Its capital, once an important center of the "true German culture," was now eroded by this detestable foreign mixture. Everywhere, he thought, as he gazed down at the taxi still parked below, behind each and every degradation, stood the Jews.

He retched. The sour taste was still with him, counterpoint to a spasmodic pounding in both temples.

He had slept badly on a stomach that, throughout the entire previous day, had known but a single serving of soup-kitchen slop. Then in the evening there had been three mugs of bitter coffee at the German workers' tavern near the Danube. His companions had been drinking tall seedels of beer. As always, he had abstained, foolishly substituting coffee for his usual mineral water.

It was a tavern he preferred over all the others in the district, a smoke-filled cave alive with boisterous chatter and disharmonious attempts at group singing. Frequented entirely by Germans, the place was an echo of a nation he had never seen but had dreamed of since his adolescence in Linz.

There were five of them around the table. They spoke for a time of politics, then Kranze, the tubercular ex-teacher, told an anti-Semitic joke. The young artist remained silent and morose through the laughter.

Plumb, a huge ape of a man, looked at him curiously. "You don't find it funny?"

"No, I find nothing funny about the Jew. To me, it would be like laughing at a plague."

Franz Schilling, the bankrupt businessman, said, "I employed some and they were just like everyone else. They got on with their work and minded their business and made no trouble." He leaned back in his chair snugly, hooking his thumbs into the vest pockets of his threadbare suit.

"Some of them are even good socialists . . . Jews," said Plumb.

Schilling rested his elbows on the table and leaned forward, the smoldering tip of his cigar just inches away from the young artist's face. "I even know one who converted—became a good Catholic."

The young artist engaged Schilling's eyes through the smoke. "Only a fool defines a Jew in terms of economics or religion or politics." He twisted his head around slowly, looking carefully at each one of them.

They were all social democrats, naive children. Plumb, he suspected, might even be an anarchist. It was futile. He felt suddenly deflated.

They sat around the table in silence. Kranze diverted his eyes upward so that his collar, no longer shadowed by a long chin, revealed a darkened yellow where it met the loose, pinched skin of his neck. He muttered, "Perhaps . . ." Kranze's voice was quiet, as if he did not really want to be heard. "I've never really trusted them."

Stahlmann, only eighteen, a waiter at Popples during the day, toyed nervously with his silk cravat and seemed to have forgotten how to blink. Plumb looked thoughtful, his mouth gaping like a drowned fish.

Finally, Schilling raised his stein and broke the tension. "Ah, but the women," he said lightly. "Surely you'll make that exception?"

"A Jewess is still a Jew."

Grinning broadly, Kranze exposed a gold tooth that lit up his emaciated face. "So! In that case we will talk about women who aren't Jewish, if it will make you feel any better. Though when you turn them upside-down, they are all the same. Is that not so?" He looked about for approval.

Plumb shook with laughter, wedging himself even tighter into a chair that was too small for him. "Bravo, Kranze! It's what they hide in their bloomers that's important!" He raised his stein in a jubilant toast, slopping beer onto his trousers. "Here's to *all* the little darlings, no matter what they are!"

It was said that Plumb, working as a porter in the West Station, had once broken a purse snatcher's spine with a single blow. The young artist watched him warily as one by one the others shouted mock toasts over the general hilarity. Finally, Plumb glanced at him

questioningly. Then the big man, about to say something, seemed to change his mind. He looked away quickly, the grin frozen on his face.

Though the topic remained sex and women, the conversation grew serious. The young artist stayed out of it, gazing into the dregs in the bottom of his cup. He had little interest in women, being shy and uncomfortable in their presence. He was aware that his lack of wit bored them. He had no small talk, no feeling for the inconsequential. As for his need, he masturbated a few times a week to vague fantasies of silent Nordic goddesses, plump and blond, like scaled-up cherubs stretched out beneath him.

He'd left the tavern early, feeling sour. Now he sat on the edge of the bed in the chill morning breeze from the open window, examining his toes. His feet were black to the ankles. He would bathe late tonight when everyone was asleep, so that there would be little chance of his having to share the large shower stall behind the hostel. The thought of exposing his body to others filled him with dread.

He retrieved a pair of black wool stockings from the floor that were stiff to the touch. He blew into them, put them on.

Standing in the cramped space between his bed and the small table, he dressed in the same soiled trousers, shirt and jacket he had worn yesterday and the day before and the weeks and months before that. They were all he had except for a greasy black derby and a threadbare, ankle-length coat given him out of pity the previous winter by his neighbor Goldman, the old-clothes peddler.

A conceited German is the worst of them all, and the most hardened of all, and the most repulsive of all: for he imagines that he possesses the truth in a *schönnee* of his own invention, which is to him absolute truth.

—Count Leo Tolstói

2

1913

As requested by his fashionably dressed female passenger, the taxi driver pulled up to the curb across from 27 Meldemennstrasse, a hulking, four-storied building of gray stone that took up the whole block. A large sign over the entrance read:

MÄNNERHEIM HOSTEL FOR MEN

The driver studied the woman in his rear-view mirror, certain that there was some mistake. A *lady* had no business in this sort of neighborhood. She would soon realize her error, then order him to return to central Vienna, where, out of embarrassment, she would overtip. They always did. With luck he could be back in the Hotel Bristol rank just in time for the morning tourist rush.

He eyed her questioningly through the glass partition as she unshipped the brass speaking tube to say in halting German, "We will wait here, please."

"For how long, madam?"

"I don't know. Perhaps an hour or more . . . maybe less. It's all right, I'll pay you for your trouble."

His sigh of resignation synchronized with the dying cough of the taxi's engine as he switched it off. It was eight twenty-two, ac-

ording to his large Swiss pocket watch. The following morning, under police interrogation, he would take pride in the fact that he was easily able to recall everything in precise detail, even the long fox fur draped over the lady's shoulders, framing the perfect profile he now viewed in the driving mirror. Though a trifle underfleshed for his taste, she was indeed beautiful, especially for an English or American woman of a certain age.

Staring out through the drawn windows of the taxi, she compared the drab landscape with the slums of London. What she saw here was benign compared to those; almost sanitary, like an old cadaver, preserved and rendered germ-free. Quite soon all of Vienna would be a preserved corpse. The knowledge saddened her.

She sat and waited, attempting to bring reality into focus while anxiously wondering if she would recognize the young man at first glance. There were many years separating him from the photographs she had studied. If doubt existed, she must begin again, possibly with the help of a private inquiry agent. She had come too far. She and Bertie had invested too much.

Twenty minutes later she caught her first glimpse of him as he descended the few steps leading from the hostel. He was walking slowly, carrying a large, battered portfolio. At a distance of thirty meters she was sure it was he, despite the wan and hungry face, half-hidden behind a ragged black stubble.

He crossed the street to her side, eyeing the taxi with what she took to be curiosity. Surely he'd seen taxis before, she thought, gripping the soft worn leather of the seat with such force that a long, exquisitely burnished fingernail split through a seam.

On the sidewalk within an arm's length of the taxi, he turned briskly, like a well-drilled soldier, then looked directly at her. It was a brief, inquisitive glance that drained the blood from her head. Trembling, she turned from his pale-blue eyes. She felt she might faint.

Then he was past, walking faster now down the Melkamenstrasse. From the rear he looked every bit the melancholy tramp, his shabby coat flapping about his ankles, long, unkempt hair hanging over his collar, the ludicrous, battered black derby, which was a size too large, covering part of his ears.

She waited a full minute, and then, with a steady voice, ordered the driver to follow the retreating figure, keeping a block from him.

They proceeded thus for a kilometer or so, making only one turn. Pedestrian traffic increased quickly as the decrepit structures of the workers' district became fewer and fewer.

Finally, her quarry turned left onto a wide avenue bustling with commuters and morning shoppers. At the intersection, she hurriedly paid off the driver, tipping him liberally, exiting the taxi as quickly as ladylike demeanor would allow. The young man was nowhere in sight.

She couldn't lose him; it must be today. She doubted she had the courage or dedication to go through it all again.

The corner was occupied by a lady's milliner, the building next to it was a new block of flats, presided over by a doorman who was costumed as a general officer commanding a regiment of hussars. Next was a large furniture shop, then a barber and finally a book merchant. It was this last that caught her attention. She knew her twenty-four-year-old quarry to be a voracious reader. The book shop seemed his most likely destination.

With long strides, made possible by a skirt that was somewhat wider at the hem than was currently dictated by fashion, she hurried down the avenue. When she passed the furniture shop, a glance told her she had miscalculated. In the window, a portly, tail-coated gentleman was tacking a pen-and-ink sketch of St. Stephen's Cathedral onto an ornate wooden screen. She had no doubts now, the sketch was in the style of another she had seen. She stepped to the curb and waited.

The young artist emerged a few minutes later, the now empty oilcloth portfolio folded and tucked under his arm. He stood for a moment, rubbing his palms together in a hand-washing gesture, uncertain in which direction to turn. As if reluctantly obeying an arbitrary order, he pivoted slowly to head back the way he had come. As he did so, his eyes swept past her, hesitated, then returned to rest on her face. He had, she was certain, recognized her as the woman in the taxi. This time she held his gaze and was surprised at her lack of anxiety. He was, she reasoned, just an ordinary man, surprisingly young and presently of no importance to anyone but her. She felt a sudden excitement, a feeling of superiority as his eyes wavered, expressing bewilderment.

With a shrug, he turned away, moving rapidly now, his shoul-

ders characteristically hunched forward. With a light step, she followed.

He stopped at a newspaper kiosk in the Square and purchased two papers, then stepped off the curb to work his way quickly through the traffic out to the center island, where he swung aboard the second car of a double tram that had just begun to move.

His action caught her by surprise. Thirty meters behind him she battled her handicap and, oblivious to the turmoil of traffic, raced out into the street. The trolley car was gathering speed. She ran, holding her skirt high, gaining ground, despite inadequate shoes that caused her ankles to twist inward on the uneven cobblestones.

Then suddenly she was on the ground, her left leg curled painfully under her body. For the first time she was aware of a discordant orchestra of auto horns and shouted warnings. A police whistle was trilling. Dazed, she glanced around to see men converging on her from out of a confusion of stalled vehicles. The brief confidence she had experienced only moments ago was gone. She had failed. Dimly, she wondered once again if she would have the courage to try again tomorrow or perhaps the next day.

A few seconds later, the double tram, spewing sparks from its overhead trolley wheel, slowed to a crawl to begin its sharp, laborious turn into the Magranstrasse.

Breathing deeply, she rose awkwardly to her feet and was running again, shoes in hand, in a desperate attempt to cut the angle and intercept the trolley before its rear car cleared the turn.

She raced wildly across the tracks into oncoming traffic, closing the gap, each step on the bare stones a separate agony. On the rear platform, a man was reaching out for her. Vaguely she sensed a handsome young face, a military uniform, as the streetcar began its acceleration into the straightaway.

Suddenly she felt her arms being gripped. She was lifted free, her naked feet barely clearing the cobblestones.

On board, she clung to him, fighting for breath, the brass buttons of his tunic pressing into her cheek. He was complimenting her on her stamina, her beautiful legs, inviting her to a champagne breakfast to celebrate her victory. Thanking him, she pulled away.

He said, "Are you English?"

"Yes." She felt lightheaded, almost giddy.

"Then perhaps tea?"

"No, thank you."

As the young officer paid her fare, she stepped into her shoes. A moment later, she saw the now familiar derby bobbing amidst the strap-hanging passengers. He was standing in the front of the car, separated from her by more than a dozen people.

She smiled gratefully at her gallant chevalier, then brushed past him to move further into the car, closer to her quarry. It was crowded. A stout, middle-aged burgher in a black frock coat tipped his hat and half-rose to his feet. She shook her head negatively, attempting still another grateful smile. Seated, there would be the danger of losing sight of the derby. The gentleman's solicitous expression turned sour. Her refusal, she knew, was somehow scandalous: *a gentleman offers, a lady accepts*. Fatigue washed over her. It was obvious that for the moment, she was no lady, but rather a wretch—soaked with perspiration, her makeup smeared, her hair down in ugly strands.

She squeezed her way through the mass of standing passengers, refusing two more seat offers, but finally accepting the gift of a leather strap loop. With eyes half closed, she swayed gently. The chase had sapped her energy; her ankle throbbled now in cadence with a still pounding heartbeat.

The tram had stopped. The derby was gone. She fought her way through to the exit. Finally, she was on the street and in the center island. The departing streetcar cleared her view; her quarry had reached the sidewalk. Favoring a weak ankle, she followed, vaguely surprised at her own sense of purpose.

He entered Popples, a large café taking up almost half the streetfront. There was no hurry now. She thought it best that he be seated when she entered. Limping slightly, she paced the length of the street twice, giving him five minutes.

The cavernous interior of Popples was a rococo hothouse made fragrant by the warm aroma of roasting coffee and fresh baking. Chairs and tables grew out of a dense jungle of potted palms and giant rubber plants. Overhead a vast skylight bathed the large area in diffuse north light, bringing to life the painting and sculpture crowding the walls.

It was early, a slow period. With less than ten customers scattered about at remote tables, Popples seemed empty. He sat alone at

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